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Israel's Four Holy Cities I: Hebron, 1983.

Israel's Four Holy Cities: Hebron
Daniel Jeremy Silver
January 9, 1983

I've always believed that one of the tragedies of current educational practice and of our current interests is that we pay so little attention to history. Now, I don't believe that history repeats itself and I don't agree with Carl Jung that there's some kind of unconscious, emotional imprint deep in each of us, the conditioning of the past, but I do believe that we are not what we think ourselves, wholly rational and reasonable creatures, and I do know that we are born into a particular context, family, community, culture and that the decisions that we make, the decisions that our family and community and culture take are, in fact, deeply affected by the conditioning of the past. You've only to look about you across the world to recognize how many of the tensions, the aggravations, the conflicts, are conflicts which are carryovers from times past. And so I thought I would take as an historic theme as my min-series for the year, a theme which seemingly has very little to do with our times and our life, the jargon word is relevance, and try to suggest to you how consideration of the four holy cities of Israel, in fact, can tell us a great deal about our times and about Middle Eastern conflict and about ourselves.

Let me begin by reminding you of those wonderful, bejeweled caskets which you can see in the medieval collections of some of our better museums, they're called reliquaries. And they were built to house the bones of some martyr or a locket of hair from some Christian saint or even a piece of what was supposed to be the true cross. I've never known what the false cross was, but this is supposed to be the true cross. And if you read Christian chronicles from the Middle Ages or any of the long history of the Crusades you recognize just how important these relics of ancient spiritual heroes in fact were. There are all kinds of miracle stories: how a thief broke into a cathedral treasury and stole the reliquary and God struck him dead like Job with a thunderbolt. And if you look at the history of the Crusades you recognize that one of the compelling reasons for the Crusades was that the

Sarasan control of the holy places had choked off the supply of relics which was flowing into Europe, and no self-respecting church could really be established unless it had one of these bits of nuclear power at its very heart because in truth the faithful looked upon these relics as tangible proofs of the presence of something divine, something heavenly within the confines of that particular building. And this kind of attitude was not limited to Christianity. If you travel through Buddhist Asia you'll find in every great shrine area what is called a stupa. A stupa is a great pile of stone in pyramidal, usually cylindrical form, it can be hundreds of feet high, but inside in the very heart of this stupa, the same way as in the heart of the pyramids of ancient Egypt, there was a little box in which the faithful had kept, preserved something associated with the person of Galtamah, of the Buddha, or something associated with one of the Buddhist saftas, one of the holy men who had become a Buddhist saint.

Now, in the Muslim world, because Islam, like Judaism, believed in the resurrection of the body, they weren't about to chop up bodies so they could piece around little bits from here and there of this saint and that holy man. What you'll find instead throughout North Africa, throughout the Middle East, are little shirines. They're usually simple wattle or brick buildings, perhaps they're domed, in which there's a grave. The grave is raised above the ground usually and around the grave you'll see a place where candles can be burned, and on the grave you'll see that the faithful have placed small stones, each one representing a particular prayer for healing, for safe childbirth, for immortality, whatever the prayer may have been. And this is the tomb of some saint, some holy man, and it's believed that somehow his charisma, the spiritual power which was associated with him in life, continues even in death. Sociologists of religion have many words for this, hismanah, in the African world it's called ejuju. Whatever it is, it's that sense that there is a carryover from life to death, from death to eternity, of the spiritual, the holiness, the miraculous, the miracle-producing power of certain individuals.

There were always in all of these traditions rationalists, skeptics, who mocked at this association of graves, of reliquaries, with miraculous power. There's a story which you'll find in a number of versions in Arabic folklore of the poor man, down and out in his luck, who had nothing left finally but his ass. And he and his ass left Baghdad or Damascus, it matters little, and they went out to try and make their fortune in the world, but things went from bad to worse. And finally, the Arab didn't have a single cent to his name, he couldn't even provide the fodder for his donkey, for his ass, and his donkey died, the one thing he had. And so he buried the donkey and he lay prostrate on the ground in grief and a wandering caravan passed by and they saw this Arab prostrate on the ground, praying they thought. And they said, surely, he's praying to a holy man, and so they all got down off their camels and their donkeys and they came and they prayed. And, of course, when you pray you leave a few dollars for the man who manages the shrine and the poor Arab now had a growing business all around the grave of his ass.

Now, lest you feel that such narishkeit is for them and not for us, let me assure you that visiting the graves of holy men, making pilgrimages to the sepulchres, the grave caves, the actual graves of the saints and the spiritual heroes of our people, was one of the most common believed-in practices among Jews which you can possibly imagine for the two thousand years or so between about the close of Biblical times down to our own day. And it really hasn't ended. Some years ago we were in Morocco and we drove up into the Atlas Mountains from Marakesh and along the road we suddenly came across a little building, a little domed, one-room building, and it had a Magen David, a star of David over the door and I got down and came closer so I could read the sign and it said: this is the grave of the holy man, Rebbe so and so, and I went inside and sure enough, there was a raised grave with a tomb stone, and it was a grave of a man who had lived in the neighborhood who died in the twentieth century. And there were candles which had been lit by the faithful which were still burning. There was a little chair nearby where one could recite

psalms, and I was told by the keeper, the man who was guarding this grave whose business it was, that Muslims and Jews from the countryside often came to this place to offer their prayers.

About three or four weeks ago we were talking about the eruv. I told you a little about the Karaites, those medieval Jews who believed in the Bible and who were faithful in their observance and believed that the rabbis had misled Jews by creating what we call rabbinic Judaism, Talmudic Judaism, and they knew, these Karaites, that the practice of visiting the graves of the dead and expecting miracles to occur there is non-Biblical. There's not a single instance in the Bible of anyone doing this as an act of piety, and they bitterly criticized rabbinic Jews for being involved in this kind of business. And the very man whom I quoted to you, Sol Ben Masliah, since I was reading from the eruv I went on and read through his work and I came across this paragraph. Now, we're talking of a man who lived in Jerusalem in the tenth century, just a thousand years ago.

How can I remain silent when some Jews are behaving like idolators. They sit at the graves, sometimes sleeping throughout the night and they appeal to the dead: 'Oh, R. Jose ha-Gelil. Heal me, grant me children. They kindle lights there and offer incense.

Now, the practice was, and still is among some of the most faithful, you can see it near Svat, Narom and in Israel, the practice was to come to the graves, sometimes with a little prepared petition, to pray at the grave, to expect somehow that the magic, the manna, of the holy man will somehow intercede for you in Heaven and that your prayer will, therefore, be granted. And when we speak of the four holy cities of Israel, that's a medieval term, we speak of four cities which are designated as holy because they had holy graves, not because people who were holy continued to live there, not because they were associated with great events in the past or because they were the burial place of the great ancestor. Before I speak of these cities, particularly Hebron, the theme of the morning, let me just make one observation. We're creatures of the senses, and I think one can make the argu-

ment that modern Judaism, liberal Judaism, has been far too reliant upon the mind, been far too academic, far too antiseptic. Now I'm not arguing that we ought to begin burying our great religious heroes underneath the floors of the synagogue the way it's done in Europe or that we ought to hang the hats of the Cardinals from our lights up there. Nor am I arguing that we ought to turn Mayfield into a tourist attraction, but I am suggesting that when in a traditional synagogue the Torah is paraded around the room and the faithful reach out with the tip or the corner of their tallit and they touch the Torah scroll and then touch it to their lips. That act, that physical act of touching something which is symbolic of that which is divine, of that which is holy, is worth all of the brilliant reading and chanting of the Torah, all of the brilliant interpretation of the message of the Torah, it's a simple act of confirmation. And somehow we need that sense. We need to appeal to the senses, to the eye and to the ear and to the touch in our tradition far more, I'm afraid, than we in the liberal segments of Judaism have done.

I want to speak first of Hebron because it has the oldest graves, and because it has the graves which are the most immediate source of concern and of conflict. It's interesting how graves that are four thousand years old can in fact be part of the source of conflict in the twentieth century. I read to you this morning the story of the purchase of the cave of Mahpelah by Abraham for the burial of his wife, Sarah. The cave is in Hebron. The meeting place, the public assembly where he bought the grave, the field and the grave, was at the gate of the city of Hebron. Abraham, who was a semi-bedouin, spent a great deal of time in and around Hebron. The Tarabints of Mamre under which he sat, this great oak tree under which he sat when the visitors came by who were on their way to tell Sodom of Gamurah of their destruction was supposed to have been near Hebron, and if you went to Hebron early in this century the guide would still point out to you Abraham's tree.

The grave of Masara was by tradition in Hebron. We don't know whether that

tradition is a continuous one. All we do know is that by the second or first century B.C.E. there's a text in the Book of Jubilees which makes clear to us that the patriarchs and the matriarchs, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah, were in fact buried there. Some time after the Hasmoneans took power the cave where the^{se} burials were supposed to have taken place was floored over and a great wall was erected. It was called, if you visit Hebron, the wall of Herod, but we're not sure it was Herod who in fact built it, it may have been built before, and Josephus in the first century indicates that these graves had great marble forms over them. Now, in Biblical times, as far as we know, no one made pilgrimages to these graves. Indeed, the Biblical tradition seems to be opposed to the whole idea because, as you know, when Moses dies they make a point of saying that no one knows where he is buried until this day. His burial, the burial of the greatest of our ancestors, was not to be known. But as far as the patriarchs and matriarchs, the fathers and mothers of the early antiquity, the tradition associated with Hebron was a particular cave, probably a doubled cave, a particular cave there which was associated with it some time in antiquity and it became a great center of pilgrimage and of prayer.

The history of Hebron is interesting for it's not only a great market city which sits on the southern edge of the pilgrimage road across the top of the Judean hills which runs from the Negev through Hebron, Bethlehem and Jerusalem into Samaria and then into the Galil, but it was for a long time the major city in that part of Judea. According to the Bible it was given to a man named Kalib by Joshua once the people had moved in and conquered the land. When David became king in Israel Hebron was for the first seven years the capital which he chose until he had conquered from the Jebusites Jerusalem and made it his own. Hebron then plays a very important role in our Biblical tradition. When Jerusalem became the capital Hebron fell into a second level, and when the Babylonian Exile took place and the leaders were taken out of Hebron, Hebron was resettled by a group called the Edamites, a group who lived in what is today Jordan, and they remained in possession

of Hebron until about the year 100, 125 B.C.E. when the descendants of Judah Macabee, the Hasmoneans, reconquered the place and that's when we first hear of the tourist trade, the religious tourist trade, and then it remains a great pilgrimage center until the destruction of the Temple. It doesn't seem to suffer as badly during the revolts against Rome as it does Jerusalem, but it's definitely a minor center, a place where people come and pray.

When the Byzantines conquered this part of the world, took it over, they built a great church within the confines of the platform which Herod apparently had built. And when the Muslims took over from the Byzantines they took over the church and converted it into a mosque which they called the Hram Al Kali, the sacred area of the great friend, Al Kali, which is the name that Koran gives to Abraham. And by and large until the Crusades Jews and Muslims co-existed in Hebron and Jews managed to remain there, to worship in or near the shrine. It was believed that burial near the burial of the ancestors was a way of guaranteeing one's protection until the time of the resurrection, and there's a tradition in post-Talmudic literature that burial in Hebron near the grave was more efficacious than burial even in the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. With the Crusades things changed and changed for the worst. The Crusaders destroyed most of the Jews who were in Hebron. When the Muslims came back they were very angry with all who were not Muslim and they put all kinds of restrictions into place. In the year 1266 a rule was passed which said that no Jew may come into the enclosed area where the caves are beyond the seventh step up into the mosque. A window was cut near the fourth step which gave down to a shaft which fell to the cavern level, and the faithful would come to that fourth step and they would take their klitel, their little prayer, and they would utter a prayer and they would drop it through the window so that it would fall down near to the grave site, what was soon to be the grave sites. And so it was throughout the long Middle Ages. It was a time of persecution. It was a time of unsettling. Jews were often pogromed. They were often mocked.

It was a very difficult situation. Jews were a very small minority in Hebron, but the faithful remained there, praying there for the coming of the Messiah, for the renewal of Jewish life. And from 1266 to 1967 no Jew was able to come closer to the graves of the patriarchs than the seventh step of the east side of the mosque of Abraham.

Now, in the 14th and 15th centuries a ghetto developed in Hebron. By that I mean a walled area within which the Jews lived, and the Jews built this ghetto for their own protection. The walls protected them from attack and almost all Jewish life was centered within maybe a square acre or two of land, the 50, the 100, the 200 families who survived there. And they had a business where they would welcome the pilgrims who came from throughout Europe. There was a little inn where they could stay until they offered their prayers. The protection seemed to have been fairly good. During times when Arabs would fight with Arabs as they're doing today in Tripoli, the smaller group would often flee into the ghetto to be protected from those who were pursuing them. And in this ghetto there was a synagogue known as the Bet Knessett Abraham-a-vinu, the synagogue of Abraham our father, which was the holiest of the synagogues in that little community.

Now, when the 19th century comes about and the Zionist movement comes into being, Hebron is by and large overlooked by the new kind of Zionist pioneer. Hebron is settled not by those who want to go out and work the land because there's very little arable land around Hebron. Hebron is not settled by those of industrial ambitions. Hebron has never been an industrial city and is not today, it's largely a small market town; but it was settled first of all by disciples of the Habad whom we've learned about in more recent years, Hasidic Jews from Eastern Europe who followed a great leader and who established around 1850 their own little yeshivah and their own little center in Hebron. And then in the early part of the 20th century one of the great Lithuanian yeshivahs, Slcbotka yeshivah, established in Hebron a second center where the young people who wanted to come and live a life of

piety, praying for the Messiah, could in fact come and study and learn. So Hebron moves into the 20th century still in the medieval world. It is the most religious of all of the cities of 20th century Palestine, both from the Muslim point of view and from our Jewish religious point of view. Still today, it's the one Muslim city in the West Bank which has no cinema. It's still the one city in the West Bank where most of the women still wear the veil, they don't appear in public so that you can see their faces. It's still the one city in the West Bank where you'll be hard put to get a hard drink at the local inn. It's been a city then whose religious past remains very much alive, and it is the one of the four holy cities in Israel which was outside of Israel, totally outside of Israel, when the partition decision of 1948 was established. Slad and Tiberias were entirely within Israel. Jerusalem was a divided city, but Hebron was entirely within the West Bank. And it was the source of emotional concern to many pious Jews that this center, associated with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob, with David, this center which for the entire medieval period had been the place where pilgrims had come for healing, to pray to the ancestors, which had been one of the centers of Talmudic study, could be a place which was denied them.

There was another reason. There was a more modern form of martyrology associated with Hebron. In 1929 the yeshivah in Hebron was attacked. The British constabulary in Hebron pulled back and before the dust had settled 67 of the yeshivah students or teachers or those associated with the yeshivah were dead; 60 more were seriously injured; and the British evacuated most of the yeshivah students from Hebron. It was the greatest blood letting pre-World War II in all of Jewish Palestine. Some remained. There was another attack on the little Jewish community in 1935, and after this attack the British evacuated all Jews from Hebron and it remained judenrein until 1967.

So Hebron speaks to what is known in Jewish historiography as the old yeshuv, that it speaks not to modern Zionists, the social idealist, the Ben Gurions and that group. It speaks to the Israel of the yeshivot, the Israel of the Adleceon, those who prayed for Zion, Israel who look upon Zion as a holy land where miraculous things have occurred, occur, and will occur again. And it is here that their martyrs fell and it is here that their martyrs are to be mourned. And so in 1967 when the Hussein made one of his classic mistakes and against the advice of the Israelis, entered into war, Hebron fell as did the whole of the West Bank and now there was a problem, the problem of religion, the problem of history, the problem of piety. Here is a city which has been entirely judenrein, entirely without Jews since 1935. Here is a city where Jews were not allowed to move beyond the seventh step up towards the grave of their most important ancestors, the patriarchs. Here was a city which was associated with holiness. Here was a city which was entirely Muslim, and now it was a city occupied by, controlled by the Israel Defense Forces. The Israeli government didn't know what to do and, as always when there's a vacuum power, indecision, someone moves in. There had arisen during those years a group in Israel called the Gush Emunim. The Gush Emunim means the circle of the faithful. It's a group of people most of whom are traditional Jews, some of whom are Jews who simply believe that we must never again allow any part of the Holy Land to fall into non-Jewish hands. Zionism must be a total experience which has lost total control of Palestine. The Gush Emunim, under a man named Moses Levinger, simply moved into Hebron. They booked as Swiss tourists rooms in the best hotel in Hebron called the Park Hotel, and in 1968, just a few months after the summer, they came, supposedly for a visit and they stayed and they stayed. And the mayor of Hebron rose up in indignation and there were speeches in the United Nations and the Israeli government, which was a labor government, complained about these people who had taken the law into their own hands, but the Israeli mood was not one which wanted to see Hebron revert to the status that it had, where Jews were condemned

and condemned and killed. And so the compromise that was worked out was simply that they pull these few families under Rabbi Moses Levinger out of the Park Hotel and they put them in the old Taggart Fortress which the British constabulary had, one of those typical police stations which dotted Israel under the British, and they put them there and told them you can bunk there and they assumed that in a few months they would get tired of all of this and they would leave. But fanatics don't get tired, and they stayed and they stayed and they stayed. And finally the Labor government said, well, there's really nothing we can do here and there's strategic reasons to build some kind of control point around Hebron, so on a hillside above Hebron at a place called Kiriat Arba which is the old name for Hebron. They began building a modern apartment city, and if you go to Hebron today you'll find it has about a thousand apartment units. It's completely separated from the old city by Awadi, but it's there, towering over the city with search lights and with a wired fence to protect it because it's still a very dangerous area. As a matter of fact, it's the area that most of those who go to Israel never visit because it's always on your list and the guide will almost always tell you it's not wise to go into Hebron today. It's interesting to go, but it's really not wise unless you have an overriding reason or overriding curiosity.

In any case, the Moses Levinger and his Gush moved up into Kiriat Arba and more and more people came to join them. There are now about 3,000, 3,500 people living in Kiriat Arba and so things went along during the 1970's. But fanatics are not only never tired but they're always thinking ahead and, after all, the Hebron that Moses Levinger is interested in was the old Hebron, the old Jewish quarter, the synagogue of Abraham Avin, the rights to pray routinely at the shrine. Now, the rights were granted and they worked out a system that Jewish times of prayer and Muslim times of prayer would not conflict, but one day in 1979 suddenly Mrs. Levinger and a number of women from Kiriat Arba and their children descended and began to squat in the old Bet Hadassah. In 1906 Hadassah had established a

medical clinic in old Hebron and this was the most important Jewish building in the town. It had remained there during the years in which Jews had not been allowed, it had been turned partially into a marketplace, but now the Jewish came down and they began to squat. This was their first attempt to move into old Hebron and, again, this time there was a Likud government. Mr. Begin talked about political undesireability of their act, but again, no one really moved against them. Instead of moving against them the IDF was in position of having to defend them from Arab attack and they remained. And finally some of the men folk came down to Bet Hadassah and joined them. And then in early 1980, about six months after this move into Bet Hadassah, a number of this group were returning from prayers at the graves and they were attacked by Arabs and six were killed, including one who was apparently the target of the attack, a rough, tough Jew who had been known to break into Arab homes, to terrorize the home owners and to tell them that they should leave because this was Jewish land and Jewish territory. It was a carefully planned attack, coordinated by the PLO. It had been known ahead of time to the mayor of Hebron. Israel's response was to exile Kowastani, the mayor, and also the mayor of the nearing town, Ahalhul, who had been cooperating with the PLO for a period of time. Tensions again rose to fever pitch and for awhile things simply staggered on until the Gush made their next move which was to come down one night and to move into two apartments next door to the ruins of the old synagogue of Abraham Avinu. Now Levinger and another family named Dome simply came and they squatted in these ruins and it became, they were Jewish places with Jewish ownership, and they said we have every right to be there. And again, indecision, and again, international complaint, and again, nothing was really done. Levinger's position, insofar as it is rational, is that this area, the old Jewish ghetto, is Jewish and it is intolerable for Jews to accept the idea that any part of the Holy Land which is theirs by possession, they have deeds to this land, should be denied to them; and that if Israel will ever pull back from the West Bank they will remain. They have

as much right to autonomy on the West Bank as do the Arabs. To say that there's some logic to this is, of course, true. To say that deep emotions are involved is obviously so. To say that this is a cause of great concern, great tension, is equally true, but how do you respond? How do you react? You're a Jew, motivated by the past, motivated by their own messianic ideas, who insist that a holy city where Jews have lived for four thousand years should not be judenrein, who insist that Jews have the right to go and to possess property which is by title theirs, who insist that Jews must be granted the rights that Arabs are demanding for themselves and Christians for themselves, entrance to the places which are holy to them.

Now, in microcosm you have here the problem of the West Bank and in microcosm you have also the reason that the simple solutions which are being offered by people to the West Bank, simple, reasonable solutions, simply won't work because there are Levingers on our side and there are Levingers on their side. And it's one thing to sit in Paris or London or Washington or wherever in the west and to say, certainly, let's work out a solution. It's reasonable for the Jews to give the Arabs the Palestinians' autonomy on the West Bank. It's reasonable for the Palestinians to give those Jews who have possession of land on the West Bank the right to remain there. It's reasonable for the Jews to get certain guarantees that the West Bank will not heavy weapons brought into it. It ought to be reasonable then for Israel to agree to withdraw and for all of this to take place. Well, what is reasonable is not always historically feasible. That's the reason to learn history.

Can you imagine the Arabs in Hebron who have since 1266 looked upon the Jews as unfortunate infidels who ought not to be among them, who can be tolerated only up to the seventh step of their haram? Can you imagine Hebron where Jews were completely done away with during the thirties and the forties and the fifties and most of the sixties being satisfied to allow the Jews to come back and establish a thriving community in the old ghetto? Can you imagine what will happen as the Jewish children of these fanatics on one side, and the Jewish children of the

fanatics on the other side mix and mingle and struggle and stones are thrown?

Unfortunately, emotion, tradition, passion, belief, all of these terms must be figured into the West Bank equation, and I guess all we can do is hope that the ancient graves of Hebron will not become the graves of moderns because of these ancient traditions and feelings and beliefs of our people and of their people. But beliefs can't be doubted, and the power of these beliefs cannot be overridden by sweet reason. The people who are in Hebron are there because they are willing to put their lives on the line for what they believe and no amount of persuasion, short of force, will force them to move out. And I can't imagine the Israeli government, any Israeli government, having the will, the political will to send the Israel Defense Forces in and to remove these people forcibly. Yamit was one thing. Yamit was in the Sinai. The Sinai is not the Holy Land. The Sinai is out there, but Hebron is a holy city. Hebron has a holy past. Hebron is a holy place. Hebron is part of the Jewish psyche, and whatever is worked out for Hebron must in some way take into consideration, whether we like it or not, whether we like these people or not, must take in the feelings and the passions of the Levingers and of their followers as well as the needs of some of us to be more rational and more reasonable.

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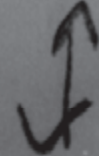
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1967 bridge between the two sides which - - and
1961 bridge
Rudolf Papp Jungs - a general leader of Czech Brown
into Berlin - 60th anniversary - Circle of the Frankfurt -
group of members determined that 2nd must be
fully redeemed - -

1968 Jungs: a few general reports - Park Hotel in
Toronto - 155 - business project - Hotel built -
unhappy - small Jungs - but added by 1, 1/2 -
area - an old hotel that - - considered
and political changes - but values from members &

all for -
1970 - 4th year change to transfer King's College
Long time of Berlin in history area - 56
End of it - 1 which means from it - 20.4
800 each - 3000 people
and report by labels large and small
middle way for each side

1971 Jungs' years more of all Jungs
Built 1969
Jungs - local area China a new street - old
area 1976 - the same - same & children
Bugs called out "illegal and politically unstable" -
but no other than 1 names of people and Jungs
present - Jungs

1950 - My - Tunnel around goes along for
page - at the level - 6 level - I a
found a hole found tonight - a number of
burrows and some of them a number can see.

1916 May - Based on email to Carol Meyer of
Hawaii - Taha KAHAKA 18000 a year of
components added to 110 - transfer and records

1941
 Yehoshua was sent to a new camp for
 1.5 hr a week of exercise - 1 hour
 religious services,
 in 1944 to a large market -
 Done at C.W. - began work - sent to
 in Poland received

Some good nest places on West Bank -
 also near shore - north of Tolarno -

George - in the great hall and - new
- of the
hall
hall and - new -

By order of the court

HOW CAN I REMAIN SILENT when some soul. are behaving
LIKE IDOLATORS. They sit at the grave, sometimes sleeping
through the night and speak to no one: 'Oh, R. tell
me about the child, the child, they kindly
lights them and open incomb.

Hebron—the City of the Patriarchs ¶ 35

to be completely renewed. The soil of this field is of a red color, wherefore the Hebrews have a tradition that Adam was of a reddish color."

The German pilgrim Burchard, who came to the Holy Land in 1280, wrote: "A bow-shot west of the Cave of Machpelah is the Field of Damascus, where Adam was formed from clay. As a matter of fact, this field has exceeding red earth, which can be molded like wax. I took a good quantity thereof away with me. So do the other pilgrims and Christians who visit these places; moreover, the Arab Saracens carry this earth on the backs of camels to Egypt, Ethiopia, India, and other places and sell it for a very precious price. Yet there seems to be only a small hole dug in the place. It is said that at the end of the year, however big the hole may have been dug, it is miraculously filled up again. I forgot to inquire about the truth of this, but I can say this much, that when I was there the hole was a small one, so that four men could scarce have sat therein and was not deeper than up to my shoulders. It is said that no beast attacks him who carries any of that earth and that it saves a man from falling."

An Italian pilgrim of the year 1347 tells of Adam's field in Hebron that "the Moslems of Egypt buy this soil at a high price and chew it as if it were a sweet."²⁹

3 / THE CAVERN OF ADAM AND EVE

In the Middle Ages there was shown in Hebron the cavern where Adam and Eve lived after they were driven out of paradise (fig. 16).

An English traveler in 1506 described the sights of Hebron: "And in the same vale is a cave in a rock where Adam and Eve dwelled when they were driven out of

* According to the sages of the Talmud, "it has been taught that . . . the dust of the first man was gathered from all parts of the earth: Adam's trunk came from Babylon, his head from the land of Israel, his limbs from other lands." (See *Legends of Jerusalem*, p. 69.)



Hebron

de Khalebi

"First the penitent scourges himself as he sees fit, three or four times, more or less; then he unbelts his clothes and when he is naked, he is covered from head to foot with a coarse sack; then he is laid on the ground and pulled and dragged back and forth by three or four strong young men; meanwhile the rabbi or the cantor walks up and down proclaiming loudly: 'Thus will be done to the man who angered his Creator, thus will be done to the man who offended his Creator. Woe to us on the Day of Judgment, woe to us on the Day of Wrath.' And the people look on and weep."³⁴

8 / THE MIRACLE AT HEBRON

"He who sees a place where miracles were wrought for Israel, should say: 'Blessed is He who wrought miracles for our fathers.'"

Many years ago a cruel Moslem sheik reigned over Hebron. One day he summoned the chiefs of the Jewish community and said to them: "Know that ye must bring me fifty thousand piasters within three days. And should ye fail, your end will be a bitter one. I shall enslave half of you and burn the rest."

The Hebron Jews were poverty-stricken and their souls shrank within them in fear when they heard this terrible decree. The rabbi ordained fasts and supplications, and all the congregation—men, women, and children—went to the Synagogue of Abraham and prayed and wept with all their hearts and souls throughout the night.

That same night the ruler had a dream. Three old men stood over him and demanded fifty thousand piasters; should he not produce that sum they would at once slay him. Terror-stricken, the sheik quickly left his bed and with trembling hands took from his treasure chest a purse

filled with gold and silver coins, which he gave them.

Meanwhile the Jews were praying and prostrating themselves before the holy ark in the synagogue, and the beadle sat at the narrow, low-ghetto gate, mournfully thinking of the plight of his community. Suddenly he heard a noise before the gate, and fear seized him, for he thought the messengers of the ruler were already come. But to his astonishment he saw the hand of a man tearing a hole through the gate, and as he gazed upon it in awe and wonderment it threw him a purse.

The beadle opened the purse and beheld gold and silver coins; he bore it with great joy to the elders of the synagogue. They opened it and found fifty thousand piasters, the sum their ruler had demanded from them. Then they understood that the hand of God had wrought this miracle, and they rejoiced greatly.

Three days passed, then the soldiers burst into the ghetto and demanded the money. The rabbi handed the purse to them. They brought it to their lord, who recognized the purse he had taken out from his treasury to give the three elders of his dream; he understood that God had aided the Jews, and cried: "Behold, the Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps."

The Jews of Hebron appointed the fourteenth day of the month of Kislev as a day of joy and gladness to commemorate the miracle. This festival of theirs they called *Takka Purim*. *Takka* is the Arabic name for a small lattice, and the reference is to the lattice torn in the ghetto gate, whereby the hidden hand forced its way and threw the purse.

For many years one could see the hole in the lattice of the gate, and when a new door was prepared for the ghetto, a perforation was made in it in memory of the miracle of *Takka Purim*, and thus it remained until the Jewish quarter was destroyed in the riots of 1929.³⁵