

The Road of Valor

From Jerusalem To Hebron

With Chaim Mageni ל"ו

We invite you to join a one day trip from Jerusalem to Hebron, guided by Hayim Mageni ל"ו.

This tour was recorded at the initiative of Rabbi Chaim U. Lifshitz, approximately fifteen years ago, and was published in serial form in "The Jewish Press"

To our sorrow, not all of the sites visited are presently accessible to Jewish visitors. We pray that they may be returned speedily to our hands.

We thank Raphael Blumberg and Zvi Ofer for editing this booklet, and Mona Blumberg for typing it.

Pictures from the tour can be seen in the Hebrew section of the book, which follows the English section.

Enjoy the tour!

The Mageni Family.

Derech Ha'avot – the Road South out of Jerusalem

This is Chaim Mageni...

We are now right next to the gate on the western side of the walls of the Old City of Yerushalayim. This gate, as we know, is referred to by anyone speaking in English or Hebrew as Jaffa Gate, Sha'ar Yaffo, and it is so known because there is a route that goes westward from that gate towards the Old City of Yaffo, the area of modern Tel Aviv.

However, what is generally less known to the Hebrew or English speaking public is that the gate is known by the Arabs by the name Bab el Chalil, literally, "the Gateway of the Friend," with the word el Chalil usually utilized by the Arabs to refer to the city Chevron. El Chalil, the

friend, is referring to Avraham Avinu, Abraham, the friend of G-d, Ibrahim El Chalil. This is the Arabic term that is based on the Midrash that views the name of the city Chevron as a mnemonic for “chaver naeh la’Adon-ai,” “close friend to G-d.”

This route begins from the gateway known also as Sha’ar Yaffo, and goes westward toward Jaffa, or modern Tel Aviv, but also goes southward from that gate towards the city of Chevron. Because of that route, the gateway at the end of the route here in Jerusalem is named the gateway towards Chevron, Bab El Chalil. This route, although paved with asphalt for modern motor vehicle traffic, is one of the three oldest arteries known to mankind in this part of the world. We refer back to the ancient period, to the oldest periods of antiquity, when the bulk of human civilization was concentrated in what is known as the Fertile Crescent in Asia Minor. At that time, the Land of Israel was a bridge country between Mesopotamia to the Northeast and Egypt to the Southwest. The Mesopotamian communities of Aram Naharayim, Aram Zova, Ur Casdim and others well known to us from our studies of Sefer Bereshit, are in fact communities from whence much of the traffic to and through the Land of Israel southwardly began.

The famous example that we all recall is that Avraham Avinu, our father Abraham, the very first Jew, upon receiving the command “Lech Lecha,” utilized this route to go from where he was born, his former home in Ur Casdim, to what was designated by G-d to be his permanent residence, the Land of Israel, and the city of Chevron as his hometown within the Land of Israel. The route that he takes is therefore called “the way of the Patriarchs,” Derech Ha’avot. For it is not only Avraham who uses it, but also after him Yitzchak and Ya’akov. For that matter, Joseph used it to, as we shall later discuss, when sent northward from Chevron to search for his brothers.

It is a route that was used by all of these, all of our ancestors in the course of their lives in the Land of Israel. This route, the Derech Avot, is one of the three arteries that connected Mesopotamia with Egypt. Of the other two, one, farther to the east, was called “Derech Hamelech,” the king’s highway. Yes! the smile on the faces of all those familiar with Brooklyn’s main street is appropriate, for it was in fact the intention of the founding fathers of Kings County, of Brooklyn, to name the main street of their community after the Biblical Derech Hamelech, King’s Highway. That route, as we learn in the Torah, was the one used by B’nei Yisrael when there was a divine decision to take the people of Is-

rael on the roundabout, longer route from Egypt into the Land of Israel upon being freed from the bondage of Egypt.

The other road, the one on the extreme western side, is the one that the Torah testifies is the shorter and quicker route and hence the route that G-d chose not to take the people of Israel along. That is the route that is called Derech Eretz Pelishtim, the route through the Philistine country on the western Mediterranean coast. Today in Israel we call it the coastal road, going down from Jaffa via Ashdod and Ashkelon and the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula and into Egypt.

As I said, of the three ancient arteries, the central one, the one that we are taking this morning, is the one that in this part of the country connects Yerushalayim with Chevron and is an integral part of the Derech Avot, the Way of the Patriarchs. This route actually has a number of other names, names that refer more to the geographic or morphologic situation than to the historic or biblical ones. It is known as Derech Bamat Hahar, the mountain range road, or the plateau of the mountains road. This is because, as we all will feel in the course of the trip, this road takes us along the top of the mountain range of Harei Yehuda, the Judean Hills that extend from Jerusalem southward. Those mountains are so named for they are an integral part of the area that was designated to be the territory or inheritance of the tribe of Judah, "nachalat shevet yehuda."

Yet the route is also known by the term "kav parshat hamayim," the watershed, or water-dividing line road. Were we to use a term more familiar to Americans, we would call it the Israeli version of the continental divide, because all of the rainwater that falls here from the clouds in the rainy winter season hitting this road, hitting this mountain range, then drains off along the slopes either westwardly to the Mediterranean or eastwardly through the Judean Desert to the Dead Sea. Hence this road is in fact a watershed or water-dividing line, being the mountain range road and also the Patriarchs' road, Derech Ha'avot, Kav Parashat Hamayim, and Derech Bamat Hahar. All three of these terms, synonymous terms, refer to that same road which will take us today towards the city of the Patriarchs, "Ir Ha'avot," the city of Chevron.

Continuing through the streets of Jerusalem, along the road that as we have already identified, is an integral part of the Derech Ha'avot, we note that the name of the street we are on is indeed Derech Chevron. In fact, we realize that not only is this a street leading out of the modern, expanded municipal boundaries of Yerushalayim, leading towards Chev-

ron, towards the route that will take us to the city of Chevron, but also throughout the ages, whenever our ancestors wished to come from Chevron to Yerushalayim, be it for the thrice yearly pilgrimage, at Pesach, Shavuot and Succot as olei regel, pilgrims of the festive occasions, or on any other occasion, it would be along this route. Hence the name, Derech Chevron, the route connecting Chevron with Yerushalayim, is appropriate. We realize also that anywhere and everywhere in the modern municipal boundaries of Yerushalayim that there is a name of another city in Eretz Yisrael as the name of any particular street, that merely means that that street is a modern asphalt pavement along a route that is an ancient artery connecting Yerushalayim with that other city.

For example, in the center of modern Western Jerusalem, the main shopping street, Jaffa Road, is in fact the continuation from Jaffa gate towards the city of Jaffa. In the Rehavia neighborhood the street called Derech Aza, Gaza Road, is the route that our ancestors used when traveling between the city of Aza and the city of Yerushalayim. From the gate that is called Damascus gate in English, but Shechem [Nablus] gate in Hebrew, Sha'ar Shechem, the road that continues from that gate northwardly towards the city of Shechem, but within the boundaries of Jerusalem, is called Derech Shechem. So we are now traveling this morning southwardly along this street that is called Derech Chevron, appropriately referring to the fact that within the expanded modern municipal boundaries of Jerusalem, this street, within the city, is an integral part of the road that takes us out towards Chevron.

The route that we are taking this morning is going southward via the neighborhoods of Talpiot and Bak'a here in Yerushalayim. As calm and pastoral and beautiful as the atmosphere surrounding us is, this route reminds us of the fact that less than twenty years ago, these neighborhoods, at the southern end of Yerushalayim, were subject to the whims of any Jordanian soldier who happened to be sitting on any of the hills just in front of us here, just to the south of the municipal boundaries of the city. And in fact, the hills surrounding us here, Bet Jallah, Mar Elias, the hills just facing Kibbutz Ramat Rachel, were for the 19 years between 1948 and 1967, dotted with Jordanian artillery installations. These, very often, were the points from which shelling of civilian Jewish neighborhoods here in Jerusalem, was unfortunately the norm, resulting in the wounding, maiming, and often killing of Jewish people living or visiting in this area.

The Southern Exit – Ramat Rachel

Here we are now passing by the Kibbutz Ramat Rachel, so named because it is on a hill from which one can see in the not too far distance the site of Kever Rachel Imeinu, the tomb of our Mother Rachel, which is on the outskirts of the city of Bet Lechem. Even though it is less than 2 kilometers, about 1 mile from here, it was millions of light-years away from us in the course of the 19 years between May of 1948 and June of 1967. During all that time, we were cut off from that part of the ancient Nachalat Shevet Yehuda, territorial inheritance or heritage of the tribe of Judah, the core of the land of Judea, and the basis for the name of our people, Jewish people, since we are descendants of people from that area. Here at this point of Kibbutz Ramat Rachel lies the border between the State of Israel's capital, the City of Jerusalem, or the parts of Jerusalem that remained within Israeli territory here to the north, and the area that we are about to travel into today, along the route that will take us towards the city of Chevron, just beyond us to the south. That area was controlled during those 19 years by the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Here on this hill at Kibbutz Ramat Rachel, many battles took place between the Arabs and the Jews in 1948 during our war for Jewish independence in the Land of Israel. Some of these battles were in fact not between our own Jewish defenders and the Arab Legion, which is called today the Jordanian Army or the Jordanian Legion, but, believe it or not, between the Jewish defenders and the Moslem brother unit of the Egyptian Army. Yes, the Egyptian Army managed to come all the way this far north, having entered and conquered Chevron and continued northward along the route that we be'ezrat Hashem will take this morning southward, reaching the Kibbutz Ramat Rachel right on the outskirts of Yerushalayim and in fact succeeding in conquering it. Three times battles that ensued resulted in Jewish defenders conquering the kibbutz back from the Egyptian forces and the Egyptian forces conquering it again back from the Jewish defenders.

The armistice line that was drawn here at the end of our War of Independence was drawn in such a way that the kibbutz remained within Israeli territory, but the line was right on the outskirts of the kibbutz in the valley, a valley which is one of the routes through which rainwater is drained off eastwardly to the Dead Sea. It is here that one can see in the distance on a clear day the mountain range of Harei Moav

along which the Derech Hamelech is located. And it is here, in fact, that we are leaving the area that for 19 years was accessible to Jews and entering into that part of Harei Yehuda, the Judean Hills, that G-d in His great kindness to us returned to our rule in the Six-Day War in June 1967 and Israel's great victory in the course of that war.

The Monument to Donny Givon

Here on our right as we leave and pass Kibbutz Ramat Rachel, we see a monument. This monument comprises two elements, and in fact is similar to other monuments like it throughout the Jerusalem region. It is a monument that has a modernistic form of commemoration of a fallen soldier – a marble slab that includes the name of the soldier who died here and few words to his memory inscribed by his comrades. But in addition to that, underneath this modernistic form of commemoration, there is a tanachic, a biblical form of commemoration, a gal ed, a pile of stones as testimony to what happened here.

We are reminded of the fact that when we read the Tanach, whenever there is an incident that the Biblical author wishes the people of Israel to remember for posterity, for all generations not to forget what happened at that spot, what was the incident that occurred, what was the hashgacha Elokit at that particular place, we often read about a pile of stones as testimony that is put at that spot. One example is when our ancestors bickered with each other and finally a covenant was signed between them, with yagar sahudata, or gal ed, being put at the spot. Another is Bnei Yisrael crossing the Jordan River led by Joshua at Gilgal, and a gal avanim, a pile of stones, being put at the spot.

All such examples should remind us that nowadays, when we commemorate the supreme sacrifice of a chayal, a soldier b'tzvah haganah l'Yisrael who died in the defense of the people of Israel in the land of Israel, it was not only in the defense of a modern Jewish reestablished sovereign state that this sacrifice was made, but also to reestablish a Jewish presence in the ancient Jewish homeland of the people of Israel. That homeland is an "Eretz asher einei Hashem Elokecha ba m'raishit shana v'acharit shana," the only part of the world, the land where the Divine consonance is over this land at all times, uniquely from beginning to end of the year.

This particular spot commemorates an incident that happened during the Six-Day War. The Israeli Air Force had acquired air superiority

throughout all the Middle Eastern skies already at the outbreak of the war on Monday morning. Flying over the Judean Hills and Jerusalem area was a plane with an Israeli pilot, Donny Givon דוני גיבון. The plane served for reconnaissance. The pilot was in the course of reporting back to headquarters that the Jordanian forces entrenched in these hills had now fled. Throughout the years, those hills had unfortunately been the location from which enormous havoc had been wrought upon the neighborhoods of southern Jerusalem and Kibbutz Ramat Rachel. Now, he reported, the area was clean of any enemy presence and the ground forces could advance and continue southward.

While reporting this, his plane was shot down. As it turns out, the shooting was from anti-aircraft artillery stationed in a monastery that we can see here on the eastern, left side of the road, a monastery that had already existed here since the Byzantine era. This building serves the Greek Orthodox church as a monastery on the site that Christian tradition claims is where Eliyahu Hanavi rested on his trip southward while fleeing Achav and Izevel, hence its name Mar Elias, HaAdon Eliyahu, Elijah the prophet. And this monastery had within its walls Jordanian anti-aircraft artillery, in gross violation of the agreement that holy shrines of all religions, Christian, Moslem, or Jewish, should not serve as military installations. In fact, it should be remembered that because of this air superiority, the Israeli Air Force could very easily have bombarded the Old City of Jerusalem and easily and quickly conquered that area in the Six-Day War. But because of Israeli sensitivity to the reasons why this agreement was a valid one, that there were so many holy shrines within the Old City of Jerusalem, buildings and sites holy to Christians and Moslems as well as to Jews, it was decided that under no circumstances should we bombard there.

The fighting therefore took place door to door, house to house, face to face on the streets of the Old City, that unfortunately also caused many casualties. But this was a decision that Israeli soldiers had made knowingly, taking into consideration the sanctity of Yerushalayim. How unfortunate it is that the Jordanian army did not equally respect that agreement, and anti-aircraft artillery was stationed within the walls of the Mar Elias monastery.

The plane flown by Donny Givon, Hashem yinkom damo, was shot by this anti-aircraft artillery from within the walls of the Mar Elias monastery and it crashed and fell. He died instantaneously at this spot where we are now stopping our car.

The monument that you see here refers to Donny Givon, a pilot of the Israel Air Force, whose plane was shot down here during the Six Day War, in the battle for the liberation of Jerusalem, as he was coming here to the aid of the fighters, fighters who had attacked the military installations of the Jordanians at Mar Elias. We look at the monument and we see the marble slab on the top, the modernistic form of commemoration, and the pile of rocks underneath, the Biblical form of commemoration. Yet with a discerning eye we also notice that an integral part of this monument commemorating Donny's memory includes also bits and pieces of the wreckage of his plane strewn along the stones right on the monument itself.

Approaching Bet Lechem

As we continue southward via the Mar Elias monastery, with the city of Bet Lechem, Yehuda appearing before our eyes straight through the front of the car, we notice beautiful olive trees to the right and left of the car. The trunks of these trees are so beautifully carved by G-d's nature that a human sculptor could not do as beautiful a job of creating the unique combination of beauty and strength that has lived through all different types of conditions. For these thick-trunked olive trees are hundreds of years old. Botanists who have checked them attribute to some of them an age of more than 700 years.

As we travel along this route on the Harei Yehuda it really is important to note that in fact these olive trees, like the grapes we shall see in a little while, like the fig trees all along the way, and like all of the other natural vegetation we see here, reflect the references that Chazal, our Sages, make to the pasuk in the Torah that talks about the seven species that the Land of Israel is uniquely blessed with: *Eretz hita use'ora vegafen...*

Those seven species are the two grains, wheat and barley, and five fruits: figs, dates, olives, grapes, and pomegranates. When we read the way in which Chazal, our Sages, refer to them, we always find it very interesting to note that the phrase used is "shivat haminim shenishtabcha bahem Eretz Yisrael." To translate that freely, "the seven species by which the glory of the Land of Israel is reflected." And we know that seldom, if ever, do we find the phrase "shivat haminim shenitbarecha bahem Eretz Yisrael," "the seven species with which the

land of Israel was blessed," even though we often refer to the seven species that way in our generation when talking about them.

The Zohar, "The Splendor," is the Midrashic work that serves as the source for all of the deep inner studies of the secret deep meanings of Judaism, the chochmat hanistar, or Torat "chen," the Kabbala. It was written by the greatest of Tannaitic scholars, no less a personage than Rav Shimon bar Yochai himself. It is interesting to note that already in that book, the Zohar, he refers to the special reason that these particular seven species rather than others are the ones through which the glory of the Land of Israel is reflected. I think that today we can see clearly what he is referring to as we travel here along this route on the mountain range from Jerusalem to Chevron.

For he says, although in Biblical times there were many other types of vegetation, vegetables, fruits and grains growing in the Land of Israel besides these seven species, all the other types were growing in the lowlands, or as it is put in Hebrew, "bashfela," "dehainu shoafim leshiflut." Because they are in the valleys in the lowlands, they seem to be "striving for lowness."

It is not so with those species that grow along the mountain range, Yehuda, Shomron, the Galil. Those species whose natural habitat, botanically speaking, is to develop along the top of the mountain range, seem to be striving for the heights, or as it is written in Hebrew, "shoafim lehitromemut." In other words, the uniqueness of the Land of Israel is the "sheifa lehitromemut," the constant striving for the highest heights, not being satisfied with "shiflut," with lowness. This vegetation that we see here growing naturally along these hills, the beautiful olive trees, the grapevines, the figs, the dates, the pomegranates, as well as the grains that we shall see along the way in various fields here, the wheat and the barley, reflect therefore the striving for the heights which is in fact what the Judean Hills represent.

Right next to the Greek Orthodox monastery at Mar Elias, we see on the side of the road a very interesting stone bench. As we get closer to the bench we note that in Greek and in English there is an inscription engraved in the stone which says, "Thou shalt love the L-rd thy G-d with all thy heart and with all thy soul and thy neighbor as thyself." And then it is written underneath, "This seat is placed here in memory of William Holman Hunt, o.m. painter in Jerusalem between 1854-1902, by his wife Edith with the permission of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem." And it is interesting to note that from this seat where the

painter looked out over the scenery and saw before him the view that is now so beautifully visible in a number of directions, he painted scenes of the area of Bet Lechem and its immediate surroundings.

And as we look out from this seat we see not only the city Bet Lechem, Yehuda, that is so famous and well known, but also to the east of this city the fields that connect the city, as it were, with the Judean Desert. These fields are known to us from Sefer Ruth as the fields of Boaz. When coming from the direction that we see in the distance, Harei Moav, back towards Eretz Yehuda, Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth approached Bet Lechem from the east and reached this region, the fields east of Bet Lechem. What followed was the story described in Sefer Ruth, leading up to the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, and the birth of Oved and his son Yishai, and his son David.

In other words, the area we are looking at now was the area of the birthplace of David, melech Yisrael, chai v'kayam, the king of Israel who lives eternally. David was naim zemirot Yisrael, the person whose poetic way of praising G-d expresses itself in the Tehillim, in the Psalms, and serves as motivation and inspiration for Jewish people throughout the world and throughout the ages. We are looking, in fact, at the area which is also the point from which the development of the eternal dynasty of the people of Israel begins, malchut beit David, whose reinstatement in the very near future we all hope and pray for.

A View of Herodion

Just to the east of the fields of Ruth and Boaz, we can see also from this bench on the skyline, a mountain that at first glance looks like a volcanic crater, round on top and sloped on the sides. But in fact that mountain is not a volcanic crater – there never have been any volcanoes in the Judean Hills. The closest volcanic eruptions to this area that ever existed were up in the Golan Heights, very far to the north of here.

In fact, what we see is not a natural mountain. Rather, it was manmade. The hill that we are looking at now was constructed by slaves more than 2,000 years ago in the days of the reign of a man who the English speaking world refers to with the title “the great.” Our own Sages refer to him with the title “the wicked.” I am referring to Hordus Harasha, who is called Herod the Great. Yet I believe that somebody just forgot to include the next word, and that he should be referred to

as Herod the Great Murderer, remembering the things he did to his wife, his children and his surroundings.

But one thing is certain. This same Herod, Hordus Harasha, who ruled the land and the people of Israel for 33 years, from the year 37 to the year 4 BCE, with his egotistic desire to go down in history as a master builder, very much succeeded in that objective. So many of the things we see in Eretz Yisrael today that are remnants of the period of our grandeur during the Second Commonwealth, the period of Bet Hamikdash Hasheni, are in fact remnants of things that were built during the years of the rule and under the auspices and reign of that Hordus, Herod.

This particular mountain is not only one that was built in that period, but was one in which he, Hordus himself, requested to be buried. As we read in the writings of Josephus Flavius, a few decades after the death of Herod, it seems that that request was heeded and upon his death in Jericho, an entourage, a funeral entourage escorted his body from Jericho to this mountain that was built up during his lifetime.

This mountain, as we now know as a result of recent archaeological excavations, is merely the high part, the upper part, of a city, the bulk of which is at the foot of the mountain. The city and the mountain, built in the form of a volcanic crater, are called Herodion, named, as you realize, after Herod himself.

Before Herod was king, and before he was Procurator of Judea, he was the Roman-appointed tax collector of the province of Judea, and he wickedly collected taxes in a manner that included physical violence. This led to his being pursued by Jews, descendants of the Hasmonean dynasty. In fleeing from them, it was here at this place that he made a stand and fought a battle against his pursuers. Upon defeating them, he decided to commemorate his victory by building up the city and the large crater-like mountain acropolis which later was named Herodion.

Topography of Bet Lechem

This Herodion mountain which is visible from here, in fact, stands as a marker for us traveling through this area. It marks off the division or dividing line between Harei Yehuda, the Judean Hills along which we are traveling today towards Chevron, and the area just beyond, just to the east of that hill, which is the Judean Desert, Midbar Yehuda, extending all the way to the Dead Sea. Let us not forget that the ancient res-

idents of the city of Bet Lechem, such as Yishai and his sons, and all the other communities that developed along the eastern end of the Judean hills, are, like Bet Lechem, referred to in our tradition as having two directions, *kfarim im shnei panim*. No, this does not mean two-faced in the sense of hypocrisy. Rather, this term refers to the idea that the location of these villages made it possible for people to earn their livelihoods in two ways:

(1) *Panim lahar* – facing towards the mountain which is very fertile, where there are many trees growing and where the people cultivate these terraces in the mountains and can in fact be very successful farmers.

(2) *Panim lamidbar* – facing the desert. The Hebrew word *midbar* originates in the root *dever*. This reminds us that one of the plagues, one of the *eser makot* that the Egyptians were plagued with, the fifth plague, was *dever*, meaning animals. It also reminds us that the term in Hebrew for pasturing of sheep is *hadbarat hatzon*, *l'hadbir et hatzon*. In other words, the *midbar* is an area containing a kind of desert in which there is not sufficient potential for agricultural development but there is enough vegetation growing there for flocks of sheep and goats to be able to graze and have enough to eat.

So it was with the sons of Yishai. The older ones were farmers in the area of the mountains, and the youngest one, the eighth son, young David, was a shepherd in the area of the desert to the east of Bet Lechem. We read about this when Shmuel Hanavi is called upon by G-d to come to Bet Lechem to anoint David, and it is the same throughout the ages for Bet Lechem and all the other villages along this line that we call *sfar hamidbar*, the borderline with the desert – villages that are still in the Judean Hills but are facing the Judean Desert continue traditionally to earn their livelihoods from both of these sources.

Gilo

As we continue southwardly along the *Derech Ha'Avot*, the Way of the Patriarchs, we see to our right a new neighborhood, a neighborhood that *ken yirbu* already has thousands of Jewish families living in it. It is part of the area that was included in the expanded municipal boundaries of *Yerushalayim* after the Six-Day War and is called Gilo.

The neighborhood is so named because it is at the foot of a mountain which we can now see ahead of us diagonally to the right, a moun-

tain that is high above the site of Kever Rachel Imenu, a site that we shall pass momentarily to our right here along the road. That mountain is the location of the village which in the days of King David, David Hamelech, is known to us because of his famous advisor, a man who unfortunately eventually gave bad advice to King David.

That advisor was really interested in supporting the interests of David's rebellious son, Avshalom. Therefore, throughout the ages, a Hebrew colloquial expression for bad advice refers to this man's name. I am referring to the town of Gilo which was the home town of Achitofel, known as Achitofel haGiloni. He in fact is the only Biblical personality that we read about in the Tanach who committed suicide, as a result of frustration when his ill-given advice was not accepted by David. He went back home and killed himself in his home town of Gilo. Achitofel HaGiloni, therefore, is the one who gave his name to the colloquial expression in Hebrew, that when one says in Hebrew, "Don't give me bad advice," often it is not said "al titen li etza ra'a" but rather "al titen li etzat Achitofel" – Don't give me Achitofel-type advice.

As we look up above and to the west of Kever Rachel and see the hill on which the ancient community of Gilo was located, we note that the Arabs who have been living on that hill for the past century and a half refer to their community by the name Jallah. And as we scratch the surface of that Arabic sounding pronunciation we begin to realize the extent to which local residents in this area, yes even Arab non-Jewish residents, are preserving the ancient names of the various towns and villages familiar to us from the Tanach, and especially, specifically from Perek tet-vav, from the fifteenth chapter in Sefer Yehoshua. That chapter gives us an all-encompassing list of the names of towns and villages that the tribe of Judah inherited upon conquering this area during the years immediately after the entrance of the Twelve Tribes of Israel into the Land of Israel under the leadership of Yehoshua about 3,200 years ago.

And we note that we Ashkenazic Jews tend to forget that in fact there is in Hebrew and not only in English a soft as well as a hard pronunciation to the letter Geh, Gimmel, or G, in English. Were we to enter a synagogue in which Jews of Yemenite origin are praying and reading the Torah, we would clearly hear that they who preserve the ancient Hebrew pronunciation more authentically than we Ashkenazic Jews do, clearly distinguish when reading the Torah between a Gimmel degusha, the Hebrew letter Gimmel that has a dot in it, traditionally, and a

Gimmel revuya, the Hebrew letter Gimmel that does not have a dot in it. And they pronounce the letter "Jih" and not "Gih". Therefore it could very well be that the Arabic pronunciation Jallah is more authentic a pronunciation of the name of the site than the way we pronounce it today – Gilo. Be that it as it may, the fact is that on the top of the mountain of the Bet Jallah Arab community is located the remnant of the ancient Hebrew town of Gilo, hometown of Achitofel. And because the new Jewish neighborhood at the southern expanded municipal boundaries of Jerusalem is located at the foot of this hill, that neighborhood is given the name Gilo.

The Aqueduct System

We have been continuing southward along the road that is not only Derech ha'Avot, but as the Torah describes this section of it, "Derech Bet Lechem Efratah," the road towards Efrat which is Bet Lechem, as the Torah also describes Efrat "hi Bet Lechem." We are able to see along this road how the road goes down, descending a bit, and then up, climbing a bit.

We look to the left, to the east of the road and we notice a number of houses built by Arabs here, one which is built with cinder blocks and has no plaster on its wall, and next to it another that has red-painted plaster over the cinder-blocks. We look under these two houses and we see an unusual phenomenon: a stone pipe that was installed here more than 2,000 years ago. Each pipe is a square block of stone quarried from the nearby limestone quarries. Each block was hollowed out in the middle with an exact 360 degree circle being chiseled out with a protrusion on one side and an indentation on the other so that each of these stones fits into the next to create a stone pipe.

When we look around us we realize that this is part of an aqueduct which connected the reservoirs further south on the mountain range, reservoirs commonly, although mistakenly, known by the name Brechot Shlomo, Solomon's Pools, with the city of Jerusalem, the Upper City in the days of the second Temple, and in fact the Temple Mount itself. The water flowed by force of gravity, without human intervention necessary to pull or pump or transport the water as far as the kiyor itself, that ritual sink-like structure on the Temple Mount that was an integral part of the Avodat Hakodesh, the sanctified ritual in the Bet Hamikdash.

As we see here, the area of Brechot Shlomo ahead of us, south of

us, is in fact topographically higher than Yerushalayim and Har Hamoriah, the Temple Mount within Yerushalayim. But as this particular spot there is an indentation in the road. In other words, the road goes down descending before going up ascending. If water were to flow here merely by force of gravity then the moment the water entered into the depth it could not then continue flowing, climbing up to the heights.

Our ancestors were as familiar with the laws of physics as we are in this modern age, and we see here that a stone pipe was installed in order to comply with the physics law of siphoning: If a pipe is closed air-tight and water enters and exits at the same altitude, even if in the middle the pipe goes down, the water will continue flowing and will not be caused to stop. This law is here reflected in this beautiful, almost completely intact unit of siphon stone pipeline through which the water flowed when the second Bet Hamikdash was still standing, from the reservoirs of Harei Yehuda to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

Bet Jallah, Har Gilo

At the junction with the road turning left, eastward into the center of Bet Lechem, we are turning right, westward. We are detouring from the Derech Ha'Avot to climb up to the top of the mountain and the Arab village Bet Jallah where the Biblical town of Gilo was located. Along the way we notice what good humor the local town fathers had when naming the hilltop. Here we see in black letters in Hebrew, Arabic and English in a green framed sign, "Mt. Everest," hinting of course that this hilltop we are driving towards is a very high peak, in fact, the highest peak overlooking Yerushalayim from the south.

This was one of three peaks that had Jordanian military installations on them during the 19 years between 1948 and 1967 that controlled the access to Yerushalayim. There was one peak at Nebi Samuel in the north, another at Har Hazeitim, the Mt. of Olives in the east, and this, the third one, at Ras Bet Jallah, the top or the head of Bet Jallah here in the south of Jerusalem. It was because of these three peaks and the Jordanian military installations that were located on them that during the first 19 years of the existence of the State of Israel, between 1948 and 1967, Jerusalem could only be developed westward in a thin elongated way reminiscent of the form of a hot dog, a frankfurter, thin and long to the west. To the north, the east and the south, these Jordanian installa-

tions made it impossible for any Jewish development to take place in those directions.

Many of us will recall in fact that upon approaching Yerushalayim before the Six-Day War, we came through a region that was referred to by the term "Prozdor Yerushalayim," the Jerusalem Corridor. It was because of these three military installations of the Jordanians that the feeling was created of being in a corridor, surrounded as we were from three high sides by the enemy as we approached Yerushalayim.

Today, ב"ה, Yerushalayim can be approached by Jews from any of all four directions with large scale Jewish development along the way on all four sides leading to and from Yerushalayim. Here, at the very top of the peak at Ras Bet Jallah, we look down to the right and we see the Jewish neighborhood of Gilo below us like in the palm of our hand. We see fig trees in addition to the olives and grapes that we have already noted previously along these mountain ranges of Harei Yehuda.

Baruch Hashem, close to twenty years after the Six-Day War, we note the accessibility of this area to the Jewish People. The hill on which the former Jordanian military installation was located is today a large Jewish field school, a "Bet Sefer Sadeh." Here, Jewish people, young and old, Israelis and Jews from abroad, come to spend between a week and two weeks of informal study, living here, leaving here every day for hikes in the immediate vicinity and coming back in the late afternoon for evening activities, including audio-visual programs to study about the region.

In addition to this field school there is a beautiful Jewish community developing here now. It includes among its residents some families of the Israeli Air Force, since there is an Israeli military installation for air defense of Jerusalem in very close proximity. Here there is also a college that was established by the Soldiers' Welfare Association, Haaguda Lemaan Hahayal, to which Israeli soldiers from all over the country come to study the history and the geography of this region, as well as military topics.

We are now stopping our car next to a new neighborhood under construction here on the top of Har Gilo or Ras Bet Jallah, which is, as I said previously, the location of the ancient Biblical town of Gilo, hometown of the infamous advisor Achitofel. We look at the beautiful new stone houses under construction here in preparation for many tens of more Jewish families that are going to be living in this neighborhood, be'ezrat Hashem, by the end of this summer.

We look out the left toward the southwest where a new Jewish city is going to be inaugurated later this afternoon in the immediate vicinity of a hill visible to us now. That hill is called by the Arabs of the vicinity "Shelbet Elyahud," which, freely translated, means "the ruined remnants of the Jews." On this peak, archaeologists have excavated the remains of an ancient Jewish town which was the location of the last stand of the Jewish fighters for independence who fought here under the leadership of Shimon ben Koziva, a man whom Rabbi Akiva himself dubbed the mashiach. In fact, based on the pasuk "darach kochav mi-Ya'akov," Rabbi Akiva referred to him as ben Hakochav, or in the colloquial Aramaic of the time, Bar Kochva, the son of the star.

Following three and a half years of fighting for Jewish independence, between the years 132 and 135, the second Jewish rebellion against the Romans led by Shimon – dubbed Bar Kochva by Rabbi Akiva – ended with the unfortunate tragic battle at the site of the town of Betar. Yes, the Arabic name for the community that they have developed in the vicinity of what they themselves refer to as the remnant of Jewish presence, Shelbet Elyahud, is Batir, so similar in its pronunciation to the ancient Hebrew name Betar. It is that same Betar to which we refer year after year on Tisha B'Av as the location where the Roman conquest of the community resulted in the tragic massacre of so many Jews that the blood of the dead Jews would flow through the ravines westward to the Mediterranean. In fact, we can see those ravines as we look out now from the hill on which the new Jewish neighborhood of Har Gilo is being developed.

It is in the proximity of that hill and the site of the tragic last stand of the Bar Kochva rebellion that a new Jewish city is in the process of being established, a city to be called Hadar Betar – the glory of Betar. Some of its neighborhoods will be known as Betar Ilit, Upper Betar. In the not too distant future it will be inhabited by thousands of G-d fearing, Torah-observant Jewish families, as the plans of the Ministry of Housing headed by the honorable David Levy called for that town to be populated by a religious population only.

In the course of our day today we shall detour a bit from the Derech Ha'Avot on our way toward Chevron to see the site where the ground-breaking and ceremony for the establishment of the city is taking place this afternoon, at the site of the new Jewish town in the proximity of the ancient Jewish town of Betar.

Here, from the top of the mountain where the beautiful, pastoral

new community of Har Gilo is developing, we cannot help but remember what it must have been like in the neighborhoods that we can see by just looking through the front of the car here – Bayit Vegan, Kiryat Hayovel, Kiryat Menachem, Katamonim and in Gonen, Patt and all Jerusalem's western neighborhoods that are in front of us like in the palm of our hand. What it must have been like living in those neighborhoods in the course of the nineteen years when this hill that we are on, so beautifully developed now with its Jewish presence, Baruch Hashem, was in fact a Jordanian military installation. From there, any Jordanian soldier could shoot at will, shelling into the neighborhoods that were inhabited by the Jewish population of Yerushalayim at the time. Baruch Hashem, today this area serves for the education of young people to help enhance and develop their feeling of attachment to their heritage, their culture and their land.

We are going to get out of the car now to get a look at some of the remnants of the ancient Jewish presence here at the site of the ancient town of Gilo, to help us learn about and understand some of the Biblical and Mishnaic sources that we often study and read. We are now walking within the carved-out rectangular section on the side of a mountain where we see niches that were carved by man 1,700 to 1,800 years ago. In certain places the niches are merely quarried, while in other places stones quarried from the mountains were used to build a retaining wall, creating the side of a large rectangular hole quarried-out section of the mountain. What exactly is this? And what do we see all around us?

As a bit of research was done here after the Six-Day War, we realize that here on the slopes of the hill where the town of Gilo was located 3,000 years ago in the days of David and Achitofel, there was also a town inhabited by Jews during the Mishnaic and Talmudic area – 1,800, 1,700 and even 1600 years ago. On the outskirts of this town were many people who obviously were wealthy enough to be able to bury their dead in the manner that in those days was considered to be esthetically beautiful. There was a strong desire on the part of many of our Jewish ancestors who lived in this area to do that which was considered esthetically modern, nice, proper, respectful. They were influenced by the way in which non-Jews would bury their dead, especially the Hellenistic lifestyle, yet at the same time, they did not wish to diverge in any way from the Halachic requirements that the body of the Jewish dead be interred in the ground itself.

Thus, the custom of burial that we find here is in many ways similar

to the large quarried sections we find in the northern neighborhoods of Jerusalem at what are called Kivrei Hasanhedrin, or in the vicinity of what was once referred to as the area of the graves of the family of Kalba Savua but which more recently we realized are really the graves of the family of Helena Mechetyab.

We find here on Ras Bet Jallah, the hill of Har Gilo, caves carved into the mountain within a rectangle. In each of these caves, stones were chiseled. The artisans who did the work were very successful and very exacting. The stone coffins fashioned this way are referred to by the Gemara in Aramaic as Gluskimaot. We are more familiar with the Greek term that is also used in English, sarcophagi, in the plural, or sarcophagus in the singular.

These stone coffins, which then had lids of stone put on them, were left within the cave. The body was buried in the coffin itself within the cave. The stone coffin was beautifully decorated by chiseling floral and geometric designs along the sides, yet it remained an integral part of the mountain.

In other words, when we describe the Halachic requirement of burying the dead in the ground, we should not have a mental picture of soil or earth. In Europe, the United States and in other parts of the world, maybe there is lots of soil and there is no need to conserve. In Eretz Yisrael throughout the ages, up to and including this very day, Jews do not bury their dead in ground that is cultivable, in earth, in soil that can provide food for the living. Rather, they invest effort. Good examples of that effort include Har Hazeitim and Har Hamenuhot. There, a chisel and hammer were taken in hand and stony terrain, lacking agricultural potential, was carved up to bury the dead in the ground. Therefore, we see here, with all the grandeur that the sarcophagi reflect, they nonetheless were stone coffins from the mountain left within the mountain cave. Hence in burying the dead in them, one did not come in conflict with the Halachic requirement. It should be emphasized clearly that this is very different from the custom among those who were completely influenced by the Hellenistic concepts of esthetics and who also buried their dead above ground in what are usually referred to as mausoleum structures, which are not permitted Halachically.

Nonetheless, as we turn around, we see an attempt being made by the local Jewish residents at preservation by putting a kind of asbestos awning over remnants. Here is a building that obviously was built above ground, is in the center of the rectangular complex along the sides of

which, in the walls of which, the holes of the caves in which the bodies were buried are carved out. And we wonder, at first glance, what sort of building was that? What was it built for? What was its purpose? A house in the middle of the Bet Hakvarot, in the middle of the cemetery? Right in the middle? It seems incongruous at first sight.

But, as we study our Talmudic sources, we realize that this structure is known to us by a very specific name. This structure is called Nefesh. Yes, Nefesh. Nefesh does not mean in the Talmudic terminology “soul.” It is not a synonym for neshama as in our own Hebrew. But Nefesh is in the Talmudic era a structure that is built over the graves as a kind of monument to the memory of those who are buried in them. It is a building where the mitablīm, the mourners, sit and pray, mention the departed and call upon the Divine to praise them, to bless them, the living, b’zchut – in the memory and in the merit of – their relations who are buried in the immediate vicinity. They call upon G-d to watch over the people of Israel by evoking the names of their relations who are surely people who are worthy of being referred to as tzadikim.

And it is in this context that the Gemara makes a very interesting statement: Although it was very common for people to put up structures called Nefesh in memory of their dead relations, it was decided that this was not necessary if the one who is buried in the vicinity is recognized as having had a significant positive influence on his surroundings to the extent that he was called by all who knew him in his life as a tzaddik: “Ein osim nefashot latzadikim, ki maaseihem hem nafshoteihem” – “It is not necessary to put up a physical material structure as a monument called Nefesh to the memory of the righteous, for the good deeds that the righteous did in the course of their life in this world have an ongoing, lasting effect that is so great that it is not necessary for a physical or material reminder to call our attention to their memory.” Their deeds and their memory are alive within us, within the generations of the living who are descended from them. When we learn about that text it is very hard for us sometimes to visualize the real meaning of the phrase “Ein osim nefashot latzadikim.” Here, before our eyes, we can see a good example of one such Nefesh, from the Talmudic Era, in the ancient Jewish cemetery among the remnants of the town of the hill of Beit Jallah, or Har Gilo.

The Olive Press at Har Gilo

As we continue walking around here on the grounds of the Field School in the newly reestablished Jewish community of Har Gilo, we see how the staff of this Field School has invested effort to gather from the immediate surroundings – within a radius of five or six kilometers – remnants of the items utilized in the past for producing olive oil from the olives that grow on the trees in the vicinity. Many of these artifacts date all the way back to Mishnaic times, but some are only a few decades old. The equipment is referred to by a Mishna in Masechet Nezikin, a masechet which is broken down into three sections of ten chapters each, that we usually or commonly refer to as Bava Kamma, Bava Metzia and Bava Batra.

The Mishna in Nezikin calls the factory in which good, pure olive oil is derived from olives by the name “beit habad.” And although the word “bad” in Hebrew literally means “material,” the fact is that the Mishnaic term *beit habad* refers to a complex that includes many items of stone and very little material other than stone.

When studying the Mishna, the details of the component parts of the *beit habad* olive oil production process may not be entirely clear. Here, on the top of Har Gilo, all components of the *beit habad* have been gathered together from the immediate vicinity and are exhibited for all to see.

As we walk around here, we see a very interesting breakdown with two separate sections. At first glance, it looks to us like there are two big stone units: A large stone bowl holding a large stone wheel with wooden units, beams and poles, connected to them and a completely separate unit with a stone base, that actually has a very large, thick wooden beam connected to a vertical wooden beam, carved in the form of a screw. The larger, horizontal wooden beam attached to it appears to rise and fall as one turns the vertical wooden screw beam.

When we look at these two separate units, we gain a better understanding of the Mishna that states: “*Hakoneh beit habad koneh gam korat beit habad*” – if one has purchased a *beit habad* – capable of completing the entire process of deriving oil from olives – then he has also purchased the beam of that *beit habad*. It is sometimes hard to visualize what this means. But after a look around here, we understand it clearly, for there are two separate units, two completely separate factory processes that were carried out here.

In the first, a large, circular stone, is carved from the limestone mountains as one large unit, "miksha ahat," one piece of bedrock. When it is quarried out of the mountain and then chiseled out in the middle to form a bowl, a wooden beam is placed in the center of the bowl. Into this bowl are poured the olives, immediately after "mesek hazeitim," harvesting of olives from trees, that takes place around the time of the Yamim Noraim, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot.

Then, another stone is put on top of this bowl. The bowl stone, by the way, is referred to in the Mishna by the name "even yam." The second that is put into it in the form of a wheel is called "even memel" in the Mishna. The memel stone has a wooden beam inserted in it so that harnessed animals – or even people – can push on the wooden beam, turning the wheel on its own axis as the even memel crushes all the zeitim, olives, in the stone bowl called even yam.

Yet, when this whole process is completed and all of the olives – pits, skin and meat – are crushed together, one still does not have olive oil. This crushed, mashed material is then gathered in baskets intentionally woven with a heavy thread or wool. Perhaps this is the reason the process has the word "bad" as an integral part of its name.

These woven baskets filled with all of the crushed, mashed material are then brought to the second unit. That second unit includes a stone foundation on which the woven baskets filled with this material are now piled, one, two, five, ten, twenty baskets high, sometimes even thirty or forty baskets high. A wooden beam is then raised. Attachment to the screw-like vertical wooden beam allows the larger beam, the one the Mishna calls korat beit habad, to be raised so high that as many as 30 or 40 such baskets of the mashed olive material can be piled underneath it.

Then, placing a stick or other handle into the large, vertical screw-like wooden beam allows one to turn it in such a way that the korat beit habad coming down from above will squeeze the baskets. From the spout-shaped niche on the stone base where the baskets are piled, the olive oil pours into what looks like a cistern. It is not, however, a cistern for water, not a bor mayim, but a beit kibul, a cistern for juices squeezed out of the olives.

These juices are not yet called shemen. The word "oil" is not yet applied to them. They are still called yitzhar. That is the term used for the liquid that comes out of the olive before the water and oil separate. Only when it has finally settled and been separated is the oily liquid

called shemen and deemed appropriate for shemen hamishcha or for kindling the candelabra or any of the other usages of shemen.

Here, we see two separate units. Therefore, the Mishna teaches us, the person who has sold a beit habad factory cannot say to the purchaser: "Oh, so you also want the korat beit habad? Give me more money." No. It is obvious that if somebody purchased the beit habad, it is because he wants to be able to have olive oil from his olives. He cannot have olive oil from the olives by only using the first unit with the even yam and even memel. He then must use the second unit, the korat beit habad, without which the process in the first unit is not sufficient. And therefore a sale in which the person selling intends only to sell the first unit without the second unit is mekach ta'ut [a mistaken transaction] and the purchaser has every right to assume that the price that was designated was a price for both units of the beit habad.

By the way, the reviver of spoken modern Hebrew, Eliezer ben Yehuda, also refers to this Mishnaic dissertation when deciding the word to be used in modern spoken Hebrew for the utensil that we use in every day life, the screw. The Hebrew word for screw in modern Hebrew is "boreg," a term that appears in the Mishna...

Another very interesting exhibit, here on the top of the mountain of Har Gilo, prepared by the staff of the Har Gilo Field School, is in fact two units of stone: Two pieces of the pipeline of the aqueduct siphon that we looked at earlier today, still at its actual original location along the side of the road, through which water would flow from the reservoirs of the Judean Hills to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. These two units were found on the slopes of the mountain, were brought up here to the top of the mountain. As we look at them from close up, we can understand clearly how they were utilized. ...

The Talmud describes how it came to be that the uneducated 40yearold shepherd, Akiva ben Yosef, became – within a short time – the great Mishnaic sage, the Tanna Eloki, Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef. One version of the explanation appears in the Talmud Yerushalmi. It indicates that when Akiva was leaving the home of the beautiful Rachel, daughter of the wealthy Kalba Savua, he was in great despair because he was an Am Ha'aretz, because he was uneducated, so there seemed to be no chance for him to be allowed to fulfill his love for this woman. He then stopped to drink water which he drew with a bucket and a rope from a cistern along the side of the way. Pulling the bucket with the rope, he noticed the indentations that were on the side of the pi habor,

the mouth of the cistern. He looked closely and noticed that these indentations were the result of the constant use of the rope and the pulling of the bucket with the rope in the course of many hundreds and thousands of times.

And he realized that in fact something as light as a string or a rope, if used steadily with much perseverance and constant commitment, again and again and again, can really have an effect and create an indentation, a slit, in strong rock, merely as a result of this constant use. He then reasoned that in that case, it was possible that even at this late stage in his life, he could begin to study. He devoted himself to the study of the Torah to the extent that within a short time he became known as the world-famous teacher of thousands of followers and students. Those students have conveyed to us in our generation the teachings of the great sage, Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef.

Betar, Approaching Gush Etzion, Neve Daniel

Today, we are entering the site of the intended development of a city on the outskirts of and in close proximity to the ancient city of Betar. We are traveling along a roadway that has just been blasted through the mountain. It has not yet paved with asphalt but nonetheless has been well prepared with an infrastructure of silicone and crushed limestone so that our car can make its way up the winding road to the top of the hill. There, the groundbreaking ceremony for the new city of Betar is to take place later today.

Beautifully flanked in the late winter breeze on the side of this road are blue and white six-pointed starred flags of the State of Israel all along the way. These welcome us as we climb and help us identify this region – currently inhabited by so many Arabs surrounding us on many hills – as an area of Jewish presence. Besiyata dishmaya [with G-d's help] in the very near future there shall once again be a very strong, vital and vibrant Jewish community here at Betar, as there was in the past.

A sign greets us: Misrad Habinui Vehashikun – the Government of Israel Ministry of Construction and Housing, Hamoetza Haezorit Gush Etzion – the Etzion Bloc Regional Council, tekes hanahat even hapina la'ir Betar – cornerstone-laying ceremony for the new city of Betar, Adar, March 1987.

From the hill on which the cornerstone is to be laid, later today, we look around to our right, a bit to the south. We see in the rocky terrain

the recently planted saplings of a large pine tree forest. The sign tells us that it is dedicated by the Jewish National Fund as a forest in memory of the late Aliza Begin, wife of our former Prime Minister Menachem Begin, May Gd grant him long life and good health.

And then we look high above us, straight ahead due east, and we see the buildings of the center of Gush Etzion, the sports center, the swimming pool and the community center of Alon Shvut, with a large water tower protruding over the skyline due east of us. And to the left of it is a major Torah study center headed jointly by Rav Yehuda Amital and Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, Yeshivat Har Etzion, the Mount Etzion Yeshiva, visible just to the left of the water tower on the skyline.

Further to the left, northeast of us, we identify the water tower of another new Jewish community recently established here called Neve Daniel. It is named after the prophet Daniel, but actually located at the spot that until recently was so deeply embedded in our national Jewish memories as a place of tragedy. This place, which the Arabs call Nebe Daniel, is where in 1948, a convoy of Jews trying to come to the aid of the besieged Gush Etzion community was attacked by the Arabs and dozens of Jews were massacred in that vicinity. That was 40 years ago, in 1948. Today, in 1987, we see a new Jewish community rebuilt and growing here as a kind of positive revenge, not the negative kind, not death for death, but life for death. The new town named Neve Daniel, reminiscent somewhat of the Arabic name Nebe Daniel, represents Jewish life growing and developing in an area associated in our national Jewish memory with the tragedies of just under 40 years ago that happened at Nebe Daniel.

Brecht Shlomo

Just to the east on the left side of the Patriarchs' Road as we continue southward to the east of the hill on which the new community of Neve Daniel is developing, we reach three large reservoirs that together have a capacity of about half a million cubic meters of water. These reservoirs, gathering water from local springs as well as from aqueduct pipes that bring water from rains falling in a twenty kilometer radius, are commonly known by the name Brecht Shlomo, the Pools of Solomon.

In fact, these pools were built about 2,000 years ago in the reign and under the auspices of King Herod, Hordus Harasha, Herod the Wicked, Herod the Great Murderer. Herod was also the master builder

of many sites throughout Judea, for the benefit of the Judeans but no less importantly, from his subjective perspective, so that his name should go down in history as a master builder.

Well, if these three reservoirs that supply water to Jerusalem – water that would flow through the aqueduct and siphon pipes that we looked at earlier in our trip – were built about 2,000 years ago, why then is the name Solomon's pools, *Brehot Shlomo*, used to refer to them when Solomon, *Shlomo ben David*, actually lived a full three thousand years ago? Here we can see to our left a large fortress that really hints at the answer to that query.

When we look down here to the left we see a fortress that is roofless: Four walls, no roof. The Arabic inscriptions over its gate reveal that this fortress was built during the sixteenth century, about 400 years ago, overlooking the waters of these three reservoirs. The name of Suleiman the Magnificent is embedded in these inscriptions.

As we piece together the story of what happened here in the course of the past few hundred years, we realize that a very typical sort of mistaken identity is responsible for this misnomer. During the 17th century, it seems that there were Christian pilgrims here who came from Prussia, later to be known as Germany. They brought with them the books that the Christians consider holy, their New Testament, but they also took the Tanach with them. Every place that they walked, every place they visited in the Land of Israel, they tried to identify according to what was written in the holy books. When they came to these reservoirs, to these large pools, they heard the local population calling the pools and the fortress that is next to them by the name "Suleiman." Suleiman in Arabic, Solomon in English, Shlomo in Hebrew.

This referred them to the Book of Ecclesiastes, the Book of Kohelet. In both Jewish and Christian tradition, it is customary to assume that Kohelet was in fact Shlomo HaMelech. In that book, Kohelet writes that he built large and glorious pools supplying water to Yerushalayim. When we look at the area near the Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem, we can see one of these pools within the gate. But the Christian pilgrims who came here 300 years ago thought that the pools being referred to in Kohelet were in fact the pools that they were looking at here on the way between Bet Lechem and Chevron. And so they wrote in their travelogues that they saw the Pools of Solomon, referred to in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

The next group of Christian pilgrims coming to this land brought with them the travelogues of the previous Christian visitors. And of

course when they saw the name "Pools of Solomon" in the travelogue, then identified the site according to its description in that travelogue, they too wrote: "we saw the pools of Solomon." And so from one generation to the next, the name Pools of Solomon in all languages has been attributed to this site, an important and major water system but a site that in fact includes reservoirs that were built 2,000 years ago in the days of Herod, and not 3,000 years ago in the days of Solomon.

Moshav Elazar

Just a couple of kilometers further south down the road from Brecht Shlomo, as they are called, on the eastern side of the road and the new settlement of Neve Daniel on the western side of the road, we reach a new community established here a decade ago named Elazar. Elazar today is a moshav shitufi, literally meaning a settlement that combines the economic structure of a kibbutz collective with the social structure of a moshav shareholder society.

What is so unique about this site is primarily its name, Elazar – a throwback to the period 2,200 years ago that recalls the deeds of the younger brother of Yehuda Maccabi, the one referred to as Elazar Hachorani:

The Beit Hamikdash and the Mizbe'ach had been rededicated two years previously and Yerushalayim had restored its Jewish religious ritual functioning as it had been conducted in previous years. In fact, the purpose of the rebellion of Mattityahu Kohen Gadol and his sons had been fulfilled and its objective accomplished. The Bet HaMikdash had been rededicated and they were already celebrating the feast of Chanukah every year on the 25th of Kislev to commemorate this achievement.

Yet two years after the rededication of the Mikdash, the forces of the Greek Syrian army, commanded by Lysias, were marching northward from the area of Chevron with the intention of reconquering Yerushalayim and nullifying all accomplishments of the rededication that had taken place two years previously. Although Yehuda Hamaccabi had placed an ambush to try to split the forces of Lysias and prevent them from advancing past the area where the Gush Etzion communities are now located, the Greek Syrian commander, in fact succeeded in outwitting Yehuda Hamaccabi. He sent a few thousand soldiers into the valley where Yehuda expected him, but those were merely a decoy. The bulk of his forces were actually continuing by bypassing this area.

Elazar Hachorani looked out from the Jewish inhabited village of Bet Zechariya and noticed the forces commanded by Lysias advancing northward, realizing that there was nothing to stop these forces from reaching Yerushalayim and Har Hamoriah. He also noted that among the thirty-two elephants that were advancing at the head of this phalanx arranged army of the Greek Syrian forces, there was one elephant which had a royal canopy and throne on it. Elazar assumed that this was the elephant on which the commander himself, Lysias, was sitting.

His assumption was that if the commander were killed, there would be no one to take over from him. The forces fighting under the command of the Greek Syrian officer really were mercenaries fighting only for one purpose: The money they would be paid for going into battle. If the commander was killed and there was no one to pay them, they would not fight and endanger their lives.

Therefore, Elazar Hachorani decided the thing to do was to kill the commander. If the commander were killed, the forces would not advance towards Yerushalayim and all that had been accomplished by his older brother two years previously would continue to be carried out in the day-to-day reestablishment of avodat hakodesh b'Vet HaMikdash, the sacred service in the Holy Temple.

And so, Elazar decided *bimsirut nefesh*, with great self-sacrifice, that he had to find a way to kill the commander, Lysias. Charging ahead with sword in hand, disregarding the danger to his own life, he ran into and among the forces of the Greek Syrian soldiers. Reaching the elephant on which this throne was located, he stuck his sword into the stomach of the elephant from underneath, knowing well that the elephant would fall and crush him to death. Essentially, this was a suicidal act on his part. But he realized that by doing so, he might halt of the advance of the Greek Syrian forces and save Yerushalayim from inevitable destruction.

By doing so, he actually paved the way for something that in retrospect appears to be one of the most basic historiographic concepts of the Jewish People: *Maase avot siman levanim* – What happens to our ancestors is indicative of what will happen to their descendants. In fact, it is right here in this very same region that only 40 years ago, Jews opposed the advancing forces of the Arab Legion. The people fighting in this area could just as well have packed their bags, retreated and fled, as the Arab Legion was not really interested in fighting here but had its eyes on Yerushalayim. However, the Jews who fought in this region 40 years ago

understood that this is the hinterland, the backbone of Yerushalayim. For many long months, they fought valiantly and bravely and essentially halted the Jordanian Arab Legion's advance to a great extent. Once the War of Independence ended, although the Old City of Yerushalayim had unfortunately been conquered by the Jordanians, the bulk of the areas of the new city remained an integral part of the newly established independent sovereign Jewish state.

The commander in those days, David Ben-Gurion himself, wrote in his memoirs that if much of Jerusalem remained in Jewish hands in 1948, it was also due, perhaps primarily, to the people who fought in the Gush Etzion area, defending Yerushalayim from a position 20 kilometers to the south, as it were. Consequently, when young Orthodox Jewish settlers came from the United States to the Land of Israel a decade ago to participate in the reestablishment of Jewish presence in the Gush Etzion area, they decided to establish a moshav shitufi religious community here which, as I said, bears the name Moshav Elazar to commemorate the bravery and self-sacrifice of Elazar, younger brother of Yehuda Hamaccabi, 2,200 years ago. At the same time, they created a modern, vibrant and vital religiously observant Torah center and industrial and agriculturally and economically productive community here at the northern end of the Gush Etzion region.

Efratah

Across the road, on the eastern side of the highway, we now enter into the new city, a city whose name is Efratah. Already at the outset, I would like to emphasize that as we look at the road signs we will see the name Efratah, with a "heh" at the end, literally meaning towards Efrat, reminding us that in the Torah it is extremely clear that Efrat "hi Bet Lechem." In describing the burial of Rachel, the Torah tells us that Bethlehem and Efrat are one and the same.

The new city that we are now entering has been developing here over the past four years on seven hills, each with its own neighborhood and services. The hills are named for the Seven Species through which the land of Israel's glory is reflected. One hill is called Rimon – pomegranate, another Gefen – vineyard, etc. All seven comprise the city of Efratah.

Parenthetically, I wish to comment that I know that there are many who refer to this city by the name Efrat. ...

Having entered the new city of Efratah, we look across the road back to Elazar where we were a few minutes ago and see the industrial, residential and educational parts of that community. North of us are the two towers on top of the houses of Neve Daniel/ Straight ahead of us are two main buildings and a number of smaller buildings housing the hesder yeshiva called Shvut Yisrael – Return O Israel.

Shvut Yisrael, here to the left, in front of us, was in fact the first Jewish presence in Efratah. Currently, Jewish presence is flourishing thanks to the Ohr Torah Institutions, headed by the Rav Ha’Ir, the former Rabbi of the Lincoln Square Synagogue in New York, Rabbi Shlomo Hacohen Riskin, as well as the Shvut Yisrael Torah Center headed by Rav Yehoshua Ben-Meir. You now see beautiful houses all around you, inhabited by Jews from all over the world – and not just from Israel – who came here to develop a largescale scale urban Jewish presence in the Gush Etzion Region. Construction is underway on all sides and baruch Hashem, Jewish life is developing in an area that for so many years, unfortunately, was inaccessible to the Jewish People.

All these new houses going up on what until just a short time ago was barren rock literally constitutes shinui pnei maase breishit – man’s changing a status that this terrain had for centuries and millennia. The barren rock and pure virgin bedrock that had not been cultivated and had not been touched for centuries is now serving as the foundation and infrastructure of a whole new city of thousands of Torah observant Jews participating in the development of pioneering ventures in the midst of the Judean Hills, baruch Hashem.

Migdal Oz

Just to the south of the municipal boundaries of the new city of Efratah, we see the religious Kibbutz Migdal Oz, Tower of Strength. Actually, Migdal Oz is located at the foot of a mountain that is referred to in Sedra Breishit, Migdal Eder, the tower of the flock of sheep, a high point where in Biblical times flocks of sheep would be brought to be watered at the end of a day of pasture. This hill, Migdal Eder, overlooks the new communities that we are now passing on the right on the western side of the road, Alon Shvut, Kfar Etzion and Rosh Zurim.

Interestingly enough, not only in Sefer Breishit but also elsewhere, it is referred to as the place where Ya’akov Avinu rested on his way home to Chevron after he buried his wife Rachel along the way. Yet regarding

the verse “vayisa misham vayita aholo mehal’a leMigdal Eder,” stating that Israel – Ya’akov Avinu – traveled from the place where he had buried Rachel and came to a point where he pitched his tent just a bit beyond Migdal Eder, Targum Yonatan ben Uziel says: “Atra demitamen atid deitgalei malka meshiha besof yomaya” – It is the place from which at the End of Days, the anointed king, the Messianic king, will reveal himself to the People of Israel.

Targum Yonatan obviously derives this from verses in the Book of Michah. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the Targum states unequivocally that the appearance and revelation of the Melech Hamashiach, the anointed king, will begin right here on this hill facing Kibbutz Migdal Oz and the city of Efratah. Targum Yonatan is the only targum that has Halachic standing and not only status as an erudite translation and interpretation of Biblical verses.

Bet el Baraka

Just to the south and on the right we now pass a large valley. This valley actually is referred to in Sefer Divrei Hayamim Bet, in the second Book of Chronicles. And it is interesting to note that the story that is mentioned in Perek 20 in the Second Book of Chronicles is also reflected in the name of a large hostel and sanitarium whose entrance we can see right on the side of the road.

The name in Arabic and English is Bet el Baraka. What exactly is that? Well, what happened here is described in detail in the 20th chapter of the Second Book of Chronicles, perek kaf of Divrei Hayamim Bet. Just over the hill to our left is the area of Tekoa. Tekoa was the point to which the armies of Judea were gathered when there was danger of attack from the east. Three armies, in fact, had created an alliance to attack Judea from the east – the armies of Edom, Amon and Moav.

The Judean king at the time was Melech Yehoshaphat; the king whose name reflects the judgment of G-d. Yehoshaphat enthusiastically encouraged the people of Judea to prepare for eventualities even if the enemy is stronger and greater in number, sending out scouts before day-break to get ready for the eventual battle. When the scouts return, what they describe is phenomenal:

It seems that the general at the head of each of the three armies, the Edomites, Moabites and Amonites, having agreed to ambush the soldiers of the Judeans, of the Yehudim, didn’t trust each other. So the

armies of each of these goyim, who did not trust one another, each set its own ambush. In the course of the night, it seems that Moabite scouts were caught in the Edomite ambush and killed off by the Edomites. The same thing happened when the Amonites were caught by Edomites. In other words, they killed each other off.

Before daybreak, the scouts of Yehuda returned to King Yehoshaphat and described what they saw. The verse is very explicit, as their description is so clear. “Vehinei hem pegarim metim” – They’re just lying on the ground dead, corpses, having killed each other off. So many of the enemy had been killed off by one another that at that point Yehoshaphat took his army and charged ahead. What was left of the alliance of the Edomite, Moabite and Amonite armies was easily overcome.

The pasuk indicates that for three days, they gathered the spoils of war – “shlosa yamim bazezu et hashalal” – and on the fourth day they gathered – “uvayom harevi’i nikahalu be’Emek haBrachah, the Valley of Blessing, “ki sham berchu et Hashem.” It’s called the Valley of Blessing because there they blessed G-d for the victory. “Al ken nikra Emek Brachah ad hayom.” And the verse ends with the statement: “Therefore it is called the Valley of Blessing, Valley of Brachah, to this day.”

How ironic and beautifully true to note that not only Judeans but all who have lived here, including Moslem Arabs who came here in recent centuries have in fact maintained what that pasuk in Sefer Divrei Hayamim Bet describes: “Al ken nikra Emek Brachah ad hayom” – the valley is called the Valley of Brachah, Valley of Blessing to this day. And the Arabs, when asked, “What is the name of this valley?” will answer, “Baraka.” This is the Valley of Brachah, the Valley of Blessing. And the building that we see here, which is in the main building in this valley, a hostel and sanitarium, is in fact called Bet el Baraka, the House in the Valley of Blessing, by the Arabs who own and operate it.

One kilometer south of the Valley of Bracha, we pass an area with a refugee camp called El-Aroub, hinting at a name we are familiar with from the days of the rebellion of Shimon ben Koziba, the one who was dubbed by Rabbi Akiva the son of a star, and ever since then is usually referred to by the Aramaic term Bar Kochva. In fact, from the letters and documents of that period, the second century of the Common Era, we are familiar with the name of Arbaya, a name that is hinted at in the name Aroub.

However, what is much more exciting and interesting is the vast

spring in this area whose waters were incorporated into the Herodian water supply system to which we referred earlier. To this day, the spring is called Ayn Koziba. As a result of archaeological and historical research in this vicinity and discoveries of various documents in caves in the area, recently explored by the staff of the Field School at Kibbutz Kfar Etzion, we are now convinced that this is the site that was the hometown of the man whom Rabbi Akiva at first considered the Mashiach, the man who in fact headed the rebellion of the Jews against the Romans. We referred to him previously in our tour when we visited the site of ancient Betar, northwest of here, where we noted that in the year 135, the rebellion unfortunately ended with the severe Roman suppression of the Judean forces there.

El-Aroub, Ayn Koziba, Bar Kochva

However, it is here at this point, next to this spring called Ayn Koziba that we realize, as I indicated, following historical and archaeological research, that this is the hometown of the man who headed that rebellion. When our Sages refer to the name Shimon ben Koziba, they try to explain, in an allegorical, Midrashic sense, the concept of *kazav*, falsehood, which is an integral part of the word Koziba. This of course is relevant to the way in which this man eventually denied the authority that Rabbi Akiva represented and said to him “*lo me’uktzav velo miduvshav*” [neither your sting nor your honey]. It was in the wake of that statement, in which Shimon refused to accept the criticism of Rabbi Akiva, that Rabbi Akiva changed his mind about this man’s potential leadership capacity.

Nonetheless, we realize that there is also *pschat* and not only *drash*. Today we understand that the literal meaning of the phrase “Shimon ben Koziba,” that we find in all documents, including the ones he signed himself, today exhibited in the Shrine of the Book at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, is actually literally referring to the name of the place that he came from. It is not a reference to the name of his father but rather the name of his place of origin when he calls himself Shimon ben Koziba or when others refer to him that way. He was Shimon ben Koziba, Shimon who came from Koziba. Today you might find people referred to as a son of Chicago, or a son of Jerusalem in the sense that they came from that city.

Halhul, Nachal Eshkol

Five kilometers further south we find ourselves climbing along the road. This climb takes us to the highest village in Judea, a village that is more than a thousand and twenty meters, more than 3,100 feet above sea level, the village of Halhul. Now inhabited by Arabs only, Halhul is actually a Hebrew name that appears in the 15th chapter of the Book of Joshua, *Sefer Yehoshua*, *Perek tet vav*, as the name of one of the towns that were conquered and inhabited by *Shevet Yehuda* in the vicinity of *Bet Zur*.

If we look up to the right, to the west, we see the hill of *Bet Zur*. We recall that not only is *Bet Zur* mentioned in the *Tanach*, but it is the site where *Yehuda Hamaccabi* was so successful in his battles against GrecoSyrian forces headed by *Lysias*. In the wake of those battles, he was able to march on this very same road northward to *Yerushalayim* to overcome the *Mityavnim*, the Jews who had assimilated to the Greek Hellenized way of life and entrenched themselves at the *Hakra Fortress*. *Yehuda Maccabi* conquered them and then rededicated the *Bet Hamikdash*.

Ever since then, not only do we celebrate the feast of *Chanukah*, but each of the 8 nights of *Chanukah*, after kindling the *Chanukah* candles, we sing a song beginning "*Ma'oz Zur yeshu'ati*." This song hints that the site of "*rabim bi'yedei me'atim*" – the many in the hands of the few – was *Bet Zur*, the battlefield at the site that we now see here just to the right of *Halhul*. In that battle, in which *Judah Maccabee* was so victorious, G-d aided the forces of *Judah* such that they bested the masses of the Greek-Syrian forces headed by *Lysias*.

As we enter the city of *Halhul*, we see an orange sign at the side of the road. It is faded, but with a bit of effort, we can see that it says *Kivrei Natan Hanavi v'Gad Hachozeh* – *The Tombs of Nathan the Prophet and Gad the Seer* – in Hebrew, Arabic and English.

And let us not forget that although the most famous of the *Nevi'im*, the prophets functioning in the days of *King David*, was a man from the tribe of *Benjamin*, *Shmuel Haramati*, *Shmuel* from the town of *Ramah*, there also were other prophets at that time. When we study the *Book of Shmuel*, we realize the important role played by the local resident, the man who lived here in *Halhul*, *Natan Hanavi*. He had an active part in the development of the kingdom in the days of *David*, in the attempts to bring about reconciliation between *David* and his rebellious son

Avshalom and in finalizing the appointment of Shlomo, son of Bat Sheva rather than the self-appointment of the secessionist who tried to make himself king in contradiction to David Hamelech's commitment. In other words, this site, Halhul, the Hebrew name of which means water absorbed into porous limestone – "mayim mehalhelim betoch hasela" – is in fact also the site of the home and eventually also the tombs of Natan Hanavi and Gad Hachozeh.

There is a local mosque here in the city of Halhul revered by the Moslems who live here as Nebi Yunis, Yunis being their word for Yona. This is the site which Jews have identified traditionally as the tomb of Natan and Gad. A bit behind us to the left, just east of the main road, we see a newly-built, tall, white minaret. This identifies the location of the site that throughout the Middle Ages was been revered by Jews as the Tombs of Natan Hanavi and Gad Hachozeh.

Here, from the heights of the city – or, I should correct myself, the village – of Halhul, we enter the most famous valley in all Judea. This is the valley called the Vale of the Cluster, or in Biblical Hebrew, Nachal Eshkol. From Halhul are now going down into the valley. It is so named because it is from this valley that the Torah testifies in Sefer Bamidbar Perek 22, Pasuk 13, in the story of the meraglim, those who were sent by Moshe Rabbenu to scout out the Land of Israel, the Heads of the 12 Tribes of Israel who came on a pilot trip to the Land of Israel. They were called "Nesiei Haeda" – the presidents of the various tribal organizations. Or, to put it differently, the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations of the time, came to the Land of Israel to scout out the land on a pilot trip to see whether it was worthwhile to fulfill the objective of conquering and settling this land as they were Divinely commanded to do.

It was from this valley that they took a bunch of grapes that were so large that the verse says "vayisauhu bemot bishnayim" – they needed two people to carry one bunch of grapes. If we follow the Midrashic explanation, we find that it is in fact necessary for eight and not just for two to carry one bunch of grapes. So large were the grapes then and so lush and tasty are the grapes that grow here today in the Valley of Eshkol.

When we come up from the Valley of Eshkol and climb into the municipal boundaries, the modern expanded municipal boundaries of the city of Chevron, the first site we reach when we get out of the car and walk around to examine the remnants uncovered there in greater

detail is the site of Elonei Mamre, the site of Divine revelation to the first Jew, our father Avraham Avinu.

Elonei Mamre

The point at which we stopped our car at is in fact a major intersection. This major intersection of arteries in ancient times helps us to understand the Midrash Rabbah that Rashi cites in his explanation of why the Torah says Avraham Avinu chose this spot to pitch his tent and settle down. The Torah mentions the wanderings of Avraham Avinu after he received the Divine command *Lech Lecha* to leave his home in Mesopotamia in Ur Casdim and come to the Land of Israel. He goes along the length of what we called previously Patriarchs' Road. He in fact pitches a tent and builds an altar, praises G-d at *Elon Moreh* – near Shechem – and does similarly at *Bet El*. But only when he reaches this spot does the verse use the term “*vayeshev*,” or, in another verse, “*vayishkon*.” In other words, permanently settling down and not merely “*vaye'ehal*,” pitching a tent for a day or two and then folding it up and continuing on to the next place.

This place, *Elonei Mamre*, is in fact located at the major intersection of ancient arteries. The Patriarchs' Road continues from here south-southwest through the desert towards Egypt, and north-northwest from here via *Yevus*, or *Yerushalayim*, or *Shalem*, whatever name you're using in those days, further north to Shechem and the Bashan and Mesopotamia. There is also another road that continues from here eastward towards *Kikar Hayarden*, the *Jordan Plaza* and from there across the water and into the Edomite and Moabite mountain range to the east. To the west, that same road continues to the Mediterranean Sea port at *Ashkelon*.

In other words, Avraham Avinu, whose basic and most famous characteristic is *Hachnasat Orchim*, welcoming guests, hospitality, intentionally pitches his tent here at a place where by opening the tent and its flaps in all four directions, he will be able to see the travelers, the wayfarers, the convoys and caravans that are going in any of the four directions which he can view at this major intersection. It is here that the Torah testifies that Avraham Avinu settles down.

When we read the verses, we see that this site is called *Elonei Mamre*. Linguists have already noted that if it was referring to the oak trees that were owned by the man named Mamre, then the site should

have been called *Alonei Mamre*. Linguists have analyzed the verses of the Tanach and found that a flat plateau on top of a mountain range is called "elon" in Biblical Hebrew. Unlike a *bik'a* or *emek*, which is a flattened area under mountains, only a flattened area on top of a mountain range receives the name *Elon*. In other words, in addition to whatever oak trees did exist here at the time, the name of the site emphasized that this was a flattened out area, flattened out sufficiently for there to be potential for agriculture and also a pasture area for animals in the immediate vicinity.

Neither the text of Torah *shebichtav* in the scriptural verses nor even the bulk of literature of Torah *sheb'al peh*, of our Rabbinic sources, tells us whether Avraham Avinu paid any sort of rent to Mamre or whether he lived here completely free of charge. We do know that it was only many years after he first settled in *Elonei Mamre* that he went to purchase the Field of *Machpelah*. We shall deal with that topic when we get there later in our tour. However, it must be emphasized that at least 38 years, or maybe more, lapsed from the time Avraham Avinu settled down here in *Elonei Mamre* until the time that he actually purchased the Field of *Machpelah*. A quick accounting is all that is necessary. For it is here that after he was already settled down –not the moment that he arrived but after he was already here for a while – that he received the visitation of the three Divine Messengers.

Parenthetically, I want to emphasize that I cannot use the term "angels" as a translation into English of the Hebrew term "*mal'ach*," for that evokes in my mind, as a person speaking English and familiar with English literature, a mental picture of something that is extremely pagan and not Jewish at all. And therefore, I prefer to use the term that is literally the translation of the Hebrew "*mal'ach – shaliah*" and call "*mal'achei Elokim*" Divine Messengers.

It is here that Avraham Avinu receives the visitation of the three Divine Messengers. Among them is one who informs him that although he is so old and his wife is so old, they will bear a child. His wife Sarah, hearing these tidings from within the tent, laughs at the idea. And when you follow the verse, you note that at the time she was eighty-nine years old. The emphasis is on the fact that the following year, when she was ninety years old, she in fact gave birth to her son who was then called *Yitzchak*.

That being the case, she was already eighty-nine years old when she heard these tidings from the Divine Messengers, here at *Elonei*

Mamre, yet she died at the age of 127, as Chapter 23, Perek chaf gimel in Sefer Bereshit, teaches us. And only then does Avraham go to purchase the Field of Machpelah with the very famous transaction that takes place with Efron Hachiti, only taking place upon her death at the age of 127. There, we see that the accounting of at least thirty-eight years had lapsed. In my opinion, it is even longer than that, because the visit of the Divine Messengers surely did not take place within a day or two after their arrival, but after they had been here for quite a while.

Among the things that took place here at this site besides the Divine revelations via the Messengers was the direct Divine revelation to Avraham after he circumcised himself here – “vayera elav Hashem.” And it was during that Divine revelation, in fact, that the Midrash teaches us that Avraham left the conversation with G-d to welcome what seemed to him to be human guests, so important was the mitzvah of hachnasat orchim, hospitality, to him.

But we also must remember that it was here at this site that an altar was built by Avraham. The altar was built in such a way that when one slaughtered an animal on it, one could divide the pieces of the animal into two sections, one on each side of the altar, so that it would then be physically feasible to walk between the pieces. Also, a Divine promise was made to Abraham and through Abraham to all of his descendants, our nation, the people of Israel: “lezar’acha eten et haaretz hazot” – Unto your seed, your offspring, will I give this land.

The boundaries of the Land were explicitly stated in this promise: From the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates in the northeast, will be the boundaries of this land that G-d promises is the land for the people of Israel, the offspring of Abraham. We learn that this promise took place in what we call the “brit bein habetarim,” the covenant between the pieces of the slaughtered fowl and animals that in fact were slaughtered here at an altar that was put up by Avraham at Elonei Mamre.

Recent excavations have exposed a large rectangular walled-in complex. Josephus Flavius, Yosef ben Mattityahu Hachohen Haboged, was a historian who lived in the days of the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash. He lived just a few decades after the death of the wicked Herod, the Great Murderer, who was also Herod the Great Builder. Josephus indicated that this complex was built up by Herod. One reason Herod did so was to find favor in the eyes of the Jews, who would come to visit this site. In those days they already revered it. It was the site of

Elonei Mamre where the Divine revelation to Avraham Avinu took place.

Josephus notes that there was an altar visible in his day, in other words, 1,900 years ago in the first century of the Common Era. That altar was the focal point of the complex construction. In fact, this construction took that altar into consideration to such an extent that once the complex was built up, the altar was smack in the middle. In other words, it was the physical and not only the ideological center of the site. Archaeologists in recent years have been searching for where that altar might be, especially since various travelers who visited here related to a point that people who were already living here, local residents, call the altar built by Abraham. We shall see in a few minutes, as we walk around the site, what in fact has been uncovered by recent archaeological excavations and what might – and I emphasize, **might** – be what Josephus Flavius is referring to as what in his days Jews and others revered as the site of the altar that was built here by Abraham.

However, before reaching there, we look around us and we see the walls that were built up here in Herodian times that are very reminiscent of the walls of the Bet Hamikdash in Jerusalem or of the complex over the Machpelah Cave in the center of Chevron. We identify the marginal carvings as well as that design which is called “pilasters.” These are vertical columns that the Gemara in Bava Batra refers to when talking about the Beit Hamikdash in Yerushalayim, once it was rebuilt by Herod. These columns give the impression of galim, “galim belev yam,” waves in the sea, when seen from the distance.

But we also note that this site has a very ironic history to it, not only because of what happened here in Biblical times, 3,700 years ago, in the days of Avraham, but because of what happened afterwards as well, in the days of Rechavam ben Shlomo, the first of kings of the divided kingdom. The secessionist king, Yeravam ben Nevat, established his kingdom in the north and called it the Kingdom of Israel, leaving the descendant of David, the grandson of David, the son of Solomon, to be king over what came to be known as the Kingdom of Judea. We read in the Book of Chronicles that it was Rechavam ben Shlomo who fortified the cities of Judea. The fortifications of the Chevron region are located here at the northern end of the city of Chevron at the site of Elonei Mamre, with parts of those fortifications having been discovered already in the 1930s by an archaeologist who worked here then.

These hills are at a high elevation. As we stand here today in the

hot sun, the cool breeze that is so common in these heights reminds us of how nice the weather is here in the summertime and why this region had become in the course of the ages – and recently once again – a resort area. In fact, towards the end of the First Temple Period, latter kings of the house of David, in the days of Yoshiyahu, Amon, Menasheh and Tzidkiyahu, had a summer palace here in the heights of the Chevron area, at the site of Elonei Mamre.

However, the bulk of what we see as we look around us today is the remnant of the construction that was accomplished here in the days of Herod, towards the end of the Second Temple Period, about 2,000 years ago. It should not be forgotten that Herod built up this large complex to find favor in the eyes of the Jews, who had every reason to want to rebel against him. Coming to a place which was sanctified by the Jews and finding everything that Herod had installed here, rest areas, water cisterns, areas shaded from the sun, they would tend to praise Herod rather than curse him.

But ironically, what happened was that the pagan Edomites who lived in the area at the time started coming and bringing their wares and their produce to sell to the many Jewish visitors who came to this area. It was pretty much like the tourist traps you see today selling all kinds of souvenirs at sites that visitors come to from far and wide. And therefore, what developed here unfortunately was a pagan marketplace, a shuk or yerid, at the site of Elonei Mamre. This was called in our sources Yerid Botnah. The word boten refers to acorns of oak trees – the typical forestation in this area in those days.

This pagan marketplace that developed here included as part of its day-to-day activities two of the three worst transgressions from the perspective of Torat Yisrael, of Jewish tradition. There were prostitutes – kedeshot – at the markets, as well as avodah zara – idol worship – taking place in the pagan rituals that were typical of every such marketplace. Chazal, our Sages, therefore, discouraged Jews from coming here, and in fact referred to the area as “muktze mahmat mius” – so disgusting you shouldn’t even go near it – even using the term “hamecho’ar mikulam” – the most disgusting, most degenerate of all the pagan Edomite marketplaces that existed in those days throughout Judea.

Note the irony: This was the place at which G-d revealed Himself to Avraham Avinu and promised that this land will be for his descendants. Therefore, the Jewish People revered the site and visited it. Because Jews visited here, Herod built up as much as he did to make it

more comfortable for them, resulting in a large marketplace. The kind of things that were going on there led our Sages to discourage Jewish people from visiting the site.

That, however, is not the end of that historical irony. That very same marketplace also eventually became a slave market. Among the slaves that were sold here were Jews, hundreds of whom were brought here every day, in chains, after the Bar Kochva rebellion was suppressed in the year 135 at Betar, northwest of this site.

There were, in fact, so many Judean slaves that our sources in the Talmud as well as non-Jewish, Roman sources, such as the historian Hieronymus, indicate that a Jewish slave could be bought here at this marketplace in the year 135 for what is called “menat mispo layom” – as much as it costs to feed a horse for one day. That was enough money with which to buy a Jewish slave at this site in the year 135. Jews were being taken from here along the road to the port of Ashkelon and then exiled across the Mediterranean to the European continent. In other words, a great exile that took place 1,800 years ago began at this site, Elonei Mamre, Yerid Botnah, in the north of Chevron.

Nevertheless, it is beautiful to note that as we look up on the hills here to the left to the east – and as we shall see in a few minutes after we finish our tour at this site – there is now a large Jewish community overlooking this site that developed here in the past year called Ramat Mamre, Mamre Heights. This has appropriately reinstated the Jewish presence in a vibrant manner, in an area that is surely one of the most significant sites in the history of the heritage of the Jews and the attachment of the Jewish People to their land and to their culture.

There’s no need to dig to find surface remnants of pottery, tools and utensils that were utilized by the people who were here literally thousands of years ago. And these pieces of pottery are just a hint at the many layers of civilization that were uncovered here.

However, the focal point of this site – that I want us to look at right now – is what seems to me to be the altar in the center of the compound to which sources refer. There are three sides here, only two of which are constructed. The eastern side is part of the bedrock which was chiseled out at a point where stones taken from it were then used to build walls on the south and the west. But there is no wall on the north. By placing a spit or grill from one side to the next, taking pieces of wood and making a fire underneath, one could not only slaughter here but also sacrifice a burnt offering at this mizbeyach or altar construction, which is in fact

constructed in such a way that after the animal was slaughtered, one could walk towards the north and pass between two pieces of the animal sacrifice.

And therefore, although it is too farfetched to say definitively that this is the altar that is referred to in the Book of Genesis, the mizbeyach built by Avraham Avinu as described in Sefer Bereshit, all the information that we have and all the material that we see before our eyes makes it impossible for me to say that it definitely is not. It is highly likely that it may well be that very mizbeyach. There is something that strikes us Jews in Eretz Yisrael today with a feeling of “herdat kodesh,” sanctified trepidation, in recognizing that we have the privilege of being right at the site where the Divine revelation to Avraham Avinu took place.

Along the many units that we find here, remnants of construction from the days of Herod, is a casement wall that had outer and inner rows around the whole compound. And in the southwestern corner, we find a large cistern, reminiscent of what we already saw at Har Gilo, with the indentations on the side of the constructed cistern stone wall clearly indicating how many thousands of times people drew water from here with buckets and ropes, showing us that with perseverance, with continuity, a simple piece of string can even make an indentation in the rock. We are looking here at the exact 360-degree construction of a cistern that is a full sixteen meters, about 50 feet deep, gathering waters that flow in a canal starting on a hill about half a kilometer south of us, high above us – a spring that is referred to even to this day by the local population, including the Arabs, by the name Ein Sarah, named after Sarah Imenu.

Behind you, you can see the beautiful troughs carved into the stone so that animals that approached from the north could drink water drawn from this cistern. In so doing, these facilities, providing the population that came here 2,000 years ago with water, shade and lodging, are in a way reminiscent of the extent to which this site represented hospitality in the days of Avraham Avinu. The Hebrew term “eshel,” an acronym for “achila, shtiya, leviya” – food, drink and lodging – thus originated at this point.

Ramat Mamre, Kiryat Arba

We are 1.5 kilometers – just about a mile – from the walls of the ancient site of Elonei Mamre, entering the new Jewish neighborhood of Ramat Mamre, Mamre Heights. Ramat Mamre today has 200 Jewish

families – ken yirbu – and is growing and developing by leaps and bounds.

Only three years ago, the groundbreaking ceremonies took place here for construction of the first series of houses – a rectangular courtyard of townhouses. Each home is a duplex apartment, creating the large rectangular surrounding the central courtyard.

After that, individuals received permits from the Kiryat Arba Municipality to build private one-family homes, on condition that they were completed and occupied within twenty-four months of the permit's receipt. If that condition is fulfilled, property taxes for land ownership and building rights would be waived for the first owner until the house was sold. And so, baruch Hashem, nearly a hundred of the two hundred families already living here, ken yirbu, reside in beautiful one-family villas, private homes overlooking the valleys of Chevron and the neighborhoods of Kiryat Arba in the distance – neighborhoods that are already celebrating their fifteenth anniversary this year.

And now this neighborhood, Ramat Mamre, is developing as well. A road was recently constructed to connect Ramat Mamre with Kiryat Arba. Close cooperation is maintained with the Kiryat Arba community in all spheres – cultural, educational, social, industrial and economic. Contractors from Jerusalem and the Shfelah – the Coastal Plain – are building here, recognizing the area's potential.

Around us, we see another neighborhood under construction called Pisgat Mamre, Mamre Peak. As you can see, it is in the process of changing what was barren rock until now into beautifully constructed urban centers. Ramat Mamre today has a number of synagogues and an elementary school. Children in seventh grade and up attend nearby Kiryat Arba schools, which may be seen on the hilltop to the right. On another occasion, when we continue our tour in the Kiryat Arba and downtown Chevron areas, we will relate to these areas in more detail.