
HEBRON

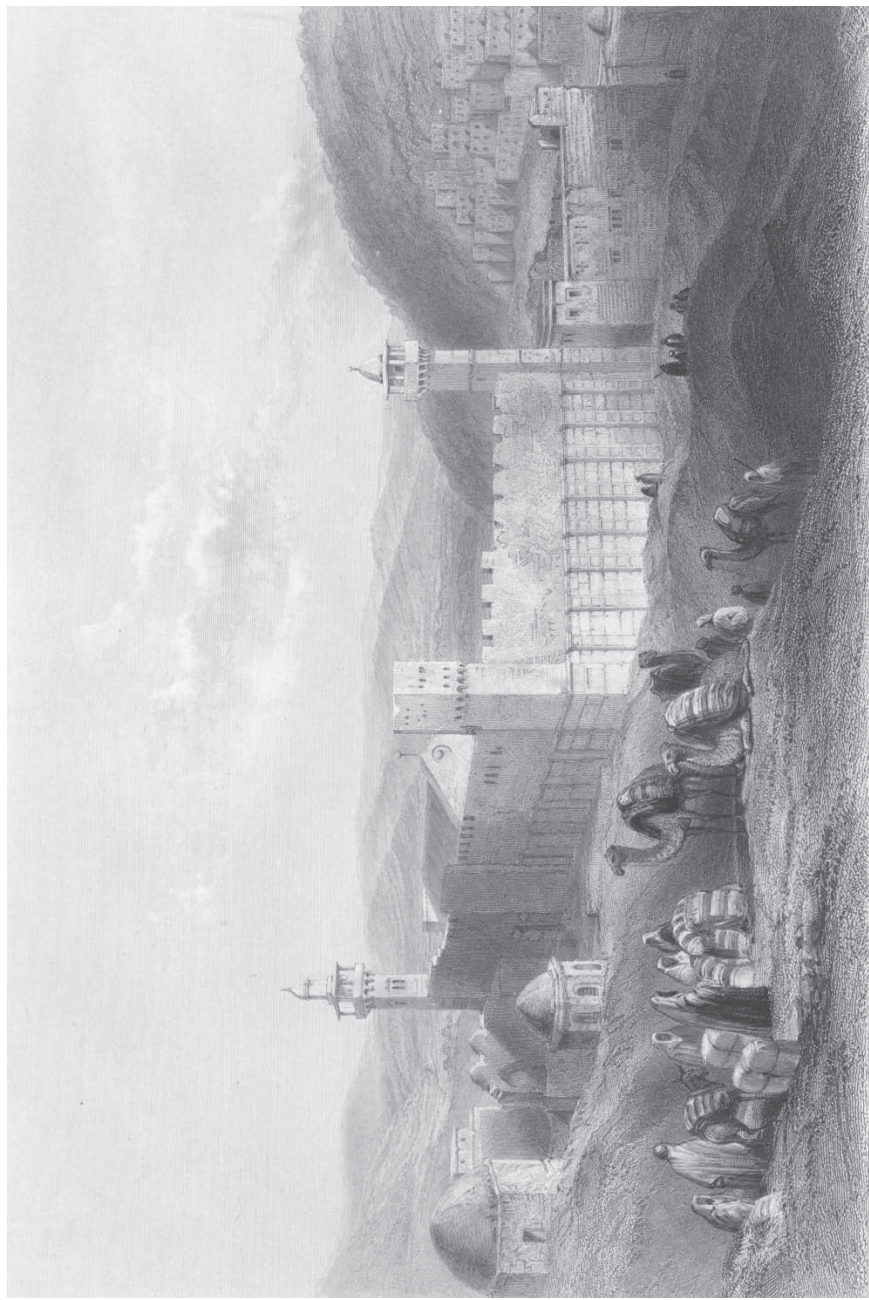
JEWES

MEMORY AND
CONFLICT IN THE
LAND OF ISRAEL



JEROLD S. AUERBACH

Hebron Jews



*Herodian enclosure surrounding Me'arat Ha Machpelah. William H. Bartlett steel engraving (1842), first published in Henry Stebbing, *The Christian in Palestine, or Scenes in Sacred History* (London, 1847), in possession of the author.*

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ROWMAN & LITTLEFIELD PUBLISHERS, INC.
Lanham • Boulder • New York • Toronto • Plymouth, UK

Published in the United States of America
by Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706
www.rowmanlittlefield.com

Estover Road
Plymouth PL6 7PY
United Kingdom

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Auerbach, Jerold S.

Hebron Jews : memory and conflict in the land of Israel / Jerold S. Auerbach.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7425-6615-6 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-7425-6617-0
(electronic)

1. Jews—West Bank—Hebron—History. 2. Israelis—West Bank—Hebron—History. 3. Land settlement—West Bank—Hebron—Moral and ethical aspects.
I. Title.

DS110.H4A94 2009
956.95'1—dc22

2009001038

Printed in the United States of America

©™ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

For Those Who Remember

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Introduction

No Jews are as relentlessly reviled as the Jews of Hebron. Vilified as the pariahs of the Jewish people—“zealots,” “fanatics,” and “fundamentalists” who illegally “occupy” someone else’s land and incessantly provoke conflict with local Arabs and their own government—they are the militant Jewish settlers whom legions of critics in Israel, in the United States, and throughout the world love to hate. It is seldom noticed that their most serious transgression, settlement in the heart of the biblical Land of Israel, defines Zionism: the return of Jews to their historic homeland.

Living in the ancient biblical city south of Jerusalem, Hebron Jews are clustered near *Me’arat HaMachpelah*, the Cave of Machpelah, the oldest Jewish holy site in the world. There, according to Jewish tradition, Abraham purchased the first parcel of land owned by the Jewish people in their promised land to bury Sarah. There, too, the other patriarchs and matriarchs—Abraham, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah—were entombed. Jews have lived and prayed in Hebron and made pilgrimages to the Machpelah shrine ever since biblical antiquity. Conquered, massacred, expelled, and exiled over the centuries, they have always remembered Hebron and they have always returned.

Hebron Jews are a unique community of Jewish memory. Their insistence on living in their ancient city expresses a fierce determination to return to the geographical and spiritual source of Jewish history in the Land of Israel. Ever since Abraham’s purchase, Hebron has been deeply embedded in Jewish history and myth. Centuries before Jerusalem became King David’s city, home to the sacred Temples on Mount Zion and

then an enduring symbol of the unquenchable yearning of Jews to return to their ancient homeland, Hebron already was a source of Jewish memory and a locus of Jewish piety. And ever since Joseph and his brothers brought the body of their father Jacob from Egypt for burial in the Cave of Machpelah, Jews have always returned to Hebron.

One of the four ancient holy cities (along with Jerusalem, Safed, and Tiberias), Hebron was honored in antiquity with designation as a city of refuge and a priestly city. It became King David's first capital, an important administrative center for King Hezekiah in his eighth-century war against the Assyrians, and a crucial battleground during the Maccabean and Bar Kokhba uprisings. There, at the beginning of the Common Era, King Herod built the massive stone enclosure around the burial tombs that remains the oldest intact structure in the entire Land of Israel.

But Jews were not alone in finding sacred meaning and inspiration in Hebron. Over the centuries, Christians and Muslims attempted to make Hebron exclusively theirs, expelling and excluding Jews to nullify challenges to their own claims of patrimony. Beginning in the mid-thirteenth century, Muslim rulers prohibited Jews (and other "infidels") from entering Machpelah to pray at the tombs, permitting them to ascend no higher than the seventh step outside the enclosure. But itinerant Jewish travelers persisted in making pilgrimages to the ancient burial site and some elderly Jews came to Hebron to be buried near their biblical ancestors.

Following the expulsions from Spain at the end of the fifteenth century, a small group of pious Jews built a community of study and prayer in Hebron on land purchased for them by a wealthy benefactor. Sephardic Jews trickled in from villages and cities in the Middle East, subsequently joined by Hasidim from Eastern Europe. They built a community whose foundations rested on the bedrock of the biblical narrative. Gathered around the Avraham Avinu ("Our Father Abraham") synagogue, in a dark and cramped quarter adjacent to the market in the center of town, they clung tenaciously to their precarious foothold, dependent for economic survival largely on emissaries dispatched to benefactors scattered throughout the Jewish world.

During much of the nineteenth century, a time of impressive community expansion, Hebron Jews maintained relatively harmonious, if largely subservient, relations with their Muslim neighbors. Hebron became widely known for its Jewish scholarship and learning; aspiring young scholars came to study with venerated rabbis. By mid-century, pioneering archaeologists testified to its antiquity, while talented artists such as David Roberts and William H. Bartlett depicted its sacred allure, placing Hebron on the expanding map of Holy Land tourism. Yeshivas (religious schools) sprouted, a medical clinic opened, and the first paved road from Jerusalem linked Hebron to other Jewish communities in Ottoman Palestine.

But in 1929, after nearly a decade of British rule following World War I, Hebron experienced another of the horrific pogroms that had long punctuated Jewish history, from Granada (1066) to Kishinev (1903). As Arab rioting swept through Palestine, the 400-year-old Hebron Jewish community was suddenly attacked and brutally decimated. Sixty-seven Jews were murdered; scores were assaulted, severely wounded, even mutilated. After British soldiers removed traumatized survivors from their homes and evacuated them to Jerusalem, Hebron—foreshadowing so many other communities in the years to come—became *Judenrein*. Two years later, an attempt to rebuild failed. During Israel's War of Independence in 1948, Hebron was conquered and absorbed by the Kingdom of Jordan. In the old Jewish Quarter, any remnants of its Jewish past—synagogues, yeshivas, even the ancient cemetery—were virtually obliterated.

When the Israel Defense Forces swept into biblical Judea and Samaria near the end of the Six-Day War in June 1967, Hebron—along with Jerusalem—was restored to Jewish control after 2,000 years. For the first time since 1267, Jews could pray inside the Machpelah enclosure at the tombs of their ancestors. The following spring, a group of predominantly religious Zionists, led by Rabbi Moshe Levinger, came to Hebron to celebrate Passover, reclaim their biblical patrimony, and rebuild the destroyed community of 1929. They formed the ideological vanguard of the Jewish settlement movement that has since embedded nearly 300,000 Israelis in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), earning worldwide enmity for their presence on land inhabited by 1.5 million Palestinian Arabs.

Hebron Jews embrace a synthesis of religion and nationalism that is anathema to most modern Jews, whether or not they live in Israel. Their religious nationalism infuriates secular Israelis, whose Zionist identity was forged in rebellion against the religion of Diaspora Jews. It antagonizes Diaspora Jews, whose religion must remain separate from nationality to demonstrate loyalty to the nation whose citizenship they hold. With their impassioned blend of Zionist nationalism and religious Judaism blamed for undermining Israeli democracy and jeopardizing Middle Eastern peace efforts, Hebron Jews may be the only Jews in the world whose critics can viciously malign them without incurring the taint of anti-Semitism.

The history of the Jewish community of Hebron is deeply rooted in the biblical narrative. In Genesis, the book of Torah that spans the epoch from divine creation to the death of Joseph in Egypt, Hebron commands conspicuous attention. In meticulous detail, Genesis 23:1–20 recounts Sarah's death "in Kiryat Arba—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan" and Abraham's acquisition of a burial place there. It might plausibly be concluded that Jewish history, as we now know it, began in Hebron.

Whenever the biblical text may have been compiled and by whom, memories of Hebron and its uniqueness in Israelite history already ran deep. After the return from Babylonian exile in 538 B.C.E., an unidentified array of writers and editors, probably in the time of Ezra the Scribe, may have constructed the enduring narrative of the prehistory of the Jewish people on the foundation of Hebron. Woven into compelling form in the biblical text; enhanced by midrashic commentary, folklore, and myth; and enriched by modern archaeological discoveries, a coherent story emerges of the importance of Hebron in Jewish history—and memory. Perhaps forever impossible to prove as “true, historical reality” (or, indeed, as falsehood), it nonetheless frames our accumulated understanding of the enduring significance of ancient Hebron in a contemporary story with momentous ramifications.

In many passages sprinkled throughout the text, the Hebrew Bible enjoins memory. Its frequently reiterated and braided commands—“*zachor*” (remember) and “*lo tishkach*” (do not forget)—assured Jewish survival through centuries, indeed millennia, of dispersion. Jewish history and memory are inextricably entwined, and no community of Jews is more tenaciously committed to the preservation of historical memory than the Jews of Hebron. But their determination to remember, in the very place where Jewish memory may be said to have originated, places them at the epicenter of a polarizing conflict within contemporary Israel—as acrimonious as the struggle between Israelis and Palestinian Arabs. It involves nothing less than the identity and boundaries of the Jewish state and the definition of legitimacy within it. Hebron Jews are widely condemned by legions of critics for misguided political and religious fanaticism that could propel Israel into a disastrous holy war with Arabs or a tragic civil war between Jews. Yet they remain fiercely determined to remember what most Jews have long since forgotten.

The secular Zionists who rode the swift currents of nineteenth-century nationalism abandoned the Judaism that had defined Jews during 2,000 years of statelessness and exile. They perceived the religion of their people to be a deformed expression of Diaspora submissiveness and political passivity. As Max Nordau insisted at the founding Zionist convention in Basel in 1896, “Zionism has nothing to do with religion.” Like other emancipated modern Jews, these iconoclastic Jewish nationalists were prepared to cast off a religion that looked backward to the past and inward to divine revelation and sacred texts. Only nationalism, stripped of religious content, could provide an answer to the Jewish Question—the place of Jews in modern society—by relocating them within the boundaries of their own homeland.

The fierce hostility of secular Zionists to religious Judaism was reciprocated by the Orthodox rabbinate, for whom Zionism was godless athe-

ism, mimicking the misguided ideas of Gentile nations. In their scathing denunciation of the nascent Zionist movement at the turn of the century, the “*Protestrabbiner*” of traditional European Orthodoxy insisted that Jews “comprise a separate community solely with respect to *religion*.” Zionism, which undermined the obligation of Jews “to serve the country to which they belong,” was nothing but a diversion from “the messianic promises of Judaism.”

Secular Zionist political activism did not mix easily with Orthodox religious passion and political passivity. Rabbi Elyakim Shlomo Shapira of Grodno, writing in 1900, wondered, “How can I bear that something be called ‘the State of Israel’ without the Torah and the commandments (heaven forbid)?” The esteemed Hasidic Rabbi Zadok HaCohen Rabinowitz of Lublin castigated Zionists who “reject all the commandments and cleave to every manner of abomination . . . [who] seek to remove from the hearts of Israel belief in God and the truth of the Torah.”

If Rabbi Shapira articulated Orthodox dogma and dismay with Zionism, Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak Kook, the renowned chief rabbi of Mandatory Palestine until his death in 1935, was exceptional in his perception of Zionism as the path to both national and religious fulfillment in the Jewish homeland. But his persistent attempts to reconcile religion and nationality, by emphasizing Zionism as an essential step in the movement from exile to redemption, fell largely on the deaf ears of secular Zionists and religious Jews alike.

These unresolved political and religious disagreements framed the Israeli Proclamation of Independence in 1948. Its Zionist signers, literary scholar Harold Fisch suggested, understood that without a “Jewish dimension,” the Proclamation would be unacceptable. So, in its prelude, they declared, “The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious, and national identity was formed. Here they achieved independence and created a culture of national and universal significance. Here they wrote and gave the Bible to the world.” It was a valiant effort, at the wondrous moment of national rebirth, to reconcile ancient Jewish unities that modernity had torn asunder, nowhere more evidently than within the Zionist movement itself.

But the peroration of the Proclamation reflected an unresolved duality. “With trust in the Rock of Israel,” it announced, “we set our hand to this Declaration, . . . in the city of Tel Aviv, on this Sabbath eve, the fifth of Iyar, 5708, the 14th day of May 1948.” That single sentence, as Fisch astutely perceived, exposed the latent ambiguities of Jewish statehood, which could neither be concealed nor resolved. *Tzur Yisrael*, the “Rock of Israel,” might refer to God—or to the collective national will of the Jewish people. “The soil of the Homeland” avoided any definition of the boundaries of the new state, which were (and sixty years later remain)

indeterminate; only Tel Aviv, for certain, belonged within them. And the double dating of the Proclamation suggested a nation suspended between the ancient Jewish and modern Western calendars, unwilling or unable to choose between them.

It was entirely understandable—indeed absolutely necessary—that the fledgling state would elevate the imperatives of survival over the intricacies and hazards of Jewish self-definition. With the urgent need to mobilize for war and absorb tens of thousands of new immigrants, there was little time for prolonged speculation about the place of Judaism in the Jewish state. Various pragmatic accommodations to Orthodoxy—the Law of Return, rabbinical control over family matters, official state observance of the Sabbath and Jewish holy days, and exemption of yeshiva students from military service—preserved a tenuous status quo between religion and state. But a deep cultural chasm separated secular Zionists and religious Jews.

All that suddenly changed in June 1967, when Israel looked into the abyss of annihilation and won a miraculous victory in six days. For the first time in two millennia, Jews regained possession of their holy places in the ancient “sister” cities of Jerusalem and Hebron. Before long, Jews returned to Hebron not only in celebration and prayer but also to rebuild the destroyed community. “With the sword in one hand and the Bible in the other,” wrote Israeli journalist Amos Elon disapprovingly, Hebron settlers had the temerity to insist that “deeds contracted in the late Bronze Age are the legal and moral basis for present claims”—as though biblical roots in the Land of Israel were not the deepest source of Zionism itself. Here was a new and passionate cohort of Zionists, settling the Land of Israel precisely as their Zionist forebears had done—only to be reviled for their Zionist apostasy.

The story of Hebron Jews since the Six-Day War is nothing less than the history of Zionism writ small: the astonishing return of a people from exile to its ancient homeland. They are Zionists whose nationalism rests explicitly on the divine promise of the Land of Israel to the Jewish people. As religious nationalists, they have restored an ancient Jewish synthesis that was stifled during the long centuries of exile and all but eradicated by Jewish modernity. Responding to the central impulse in Jewish and Zionist history, they returned “home” to the biblical Land of Israel and to the first landholding of the Jewish people there—only to be scathingly vilified ever since. Far outside the secular Zionist consensus that molds mainstream Israeli culture and identity, the Hebron Jewish community nonetheless exemplifies the theme of exile and return that has framed Jewish memory at least since the Babylonian conquest in 586 B.C.E., if not since the biblical Exodus from Egypt.

Hebron is now home to 700 Jewish inhabitants and 200 yeshiva students, residing in a partitioned city inhabited by 160,000 Palestinian Arabs. Living where few Jews can even imagine visiting, they pay a high price in physical danger, material privation, and government hostility for the opportunity to rebuild their community on the foundations of biblical memories, ancient Israelite glory, and modern Jewish tragedy. They see themselves as guardians of the deed of title that secured not only a burial place for their biblical ancestors but also a perpetual landholding for the Jewish people. Replacing the destroyed community of 1929, they assert their claim as the rightful heirs of their martyred predecessors.

The State of Israel recently marked two momentous events in its brief modern life: in 2007, it observed the fortieth anniversary of the Six-Day War, followed a year later by the sixtieth anniversary of Israeli independence. Although each date offered an appropriate occasion for enthusiastic celebration of stunning historic achievements, both provoked relentless Israeli soul-searching and lamentation: first over Israel's shameful responsibility for "*Naqba*," the Palestinian dispersion in 1948 that accompanied the rebirth of a Jewish state, and then over the "Pyrrhic" victory and occupation of "Palestinian" land since 1967. Quite astonishingly, Israelis could not remember why they should celebrate the birth and survival of the Jewish state and the return of Jews to their ancient homeland and holy sites.

Two anniversaries in 2009 are likely to attract considerably less attention and, if noticed at all, even more impassioned criticism. In this year, Hebron Jews commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the 1929 massacre, which led to the destruction and expulsion of a 400-year-old Jewish community. Simultaneously they celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of their return to inhabit abandoned Jewish property in the City of the Patriarchs after five decades of forced expulsion and exclusion. Together, these events demonstrate the unrelenting power of Jewish memory in a community of Jews committed to preserving the historical links between biblical antiquity and modern Israel, between Judaism and Zionism.

"The ability to recall and identify with our past," historian David Lowenthal has written, "gives existence meaning, purpose and value." Responding to those who criticize reverence for the past, he wisely observes, "Intense devotion to the pursuit of the past is not so grievous an affliction as to lack feeling for the past altogether." So it is that every autumn, thousands of Jews visit Hebron for Shabbat *Chaye Sarah*, when the story of Abraham's purchase of the Machpelah burial cave is read from the Torah. On that day, the boundaries of time collapse in Hebron; a Jew can burrow as deeply into the Jewish past as it is possible to return, in the

very place in the Land of Israel where it began. Within the ancient Herodian enclosure, the history, memory, and ritual of the Jewish people are intricately and joyously interwoven. On this day in the Jewish calendar more than any other, Hebron Jews reveal their enduring uniqueness as a vibrant community of Jewish memory.

1



Biblical Hebron

“Go,” the voice commanded. “Leave your land, and your father’s house, for “the land that I will show you.” Believing that he heard the words of God, Abram obeyed. With his wife Sarai and his flocks, he journeyed southwest from Haran in Mesopotamia into the land of Canaan. There he paused near Shechem, by a tree known as the terebinth of Moreh (a “teaching tree”), where God promised him, “I will assign this land to your offspring” (Gen. 12:6–7).

A wandering shepherd, Abram turned south toward the Negev, where he found ample land for grazing until famine drove him to Egypt. There he prospered, returning to Canaan “very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.” Then, once again, he heard the voice: “I give all the land that you see to you and your offspring forever. . . . Arise, walk through the land, in its length and breadth, for I will give it to you” (Gen. 13:14–17).

And so Abram came to Hebron, nestled in the hills between the Jebusite village of Jerusalem and the Bedouin markets of Beersheba. The fertile valley land, amply watered by underground springs and pools, nurtured lush orchards with olive groves and fruit trees. In its vineyards grew large and succulent grapes. The rocky soil assured fine pastures—it was known that “the cattle grow fat there.” Abram stopped amid “the terebinths of Mamre, which are in Hebron.” In the shadow of a terebinth tree that may have marked the location of a Canaanite cultic site, Abram pitched his tent. There, as he had done in Shechem, he built an altar to God.

One hot day, Abraham—renamed after the circumcision that signified his covenant with God—was seated at the entrance to his tent when he saw three strangers approaching. Rousing himself, he greeted them effusively,

offering water, bread, and shade while instructing Sarah (also newly re-named) to prepare a meal for them. In a conspicuous gesture of hospitality, he personally selected from his flock a calf, "tender and choice," for their meal together.

But the lamb wriggled free and scampered away. Abraham vigorously pursued it into one of the many caves that perforated the hilly landscape. When he entered, the fire placed inside by angels to deter further exploration suddenly subsided. Detecting an aroma of sublime fragrance, Abraham was drawn toward its source. Encountering Adam and Eve in their sleep of death, he realized that the fragrant aroma emanated from the nearby entrance to the Garden of Eden.

In this very place, according to legend, God had taken pity on Adam for the sins that prompted his expulsion from paradise. When Adam went to bury Eve, God showed him "a ray of light glinting on that spot, gleaning from the Garden of Eden." As Adam smelled the sweet aroma of paradise, he dug deeper, but a heavenly voice called out, "Enough!" Even in death, Adam and Eve could not return to Eden, but they were buried as near to it as God would permit. According to the *Zohar* (a thirteenth-century compendium of Jewish mystical writings), Abraham "recognized a sign in that cave, and there his heart's desire focused." After his discovery, he returned to this field of "supernal scents" for his daily prayers, imploring God to fulfill his own desire to be buried there. "His heart and his wish," it was said, "were always in the cave."

From the divine messengers whose visit had prompted his discovery of the burial cave, Abraham and Sarah learned to their astonishment that they would finally have a son. Yet not even the birth of Isaac constrained Abraham's restless wanderings, even as an old man, through the land of Canaan. His ample flocks required grazing land, and he may also have needed time and space to understand an ever more demanding God whose repeated trials he steadfastly met. In Beersheba, Abraham heard the fateful command to sacrifice his beloved Isaac. The unquestioning father and his innocent son began their journey together to Mount Moriah.

In the biblical narrative, the terrifying story of the Akedah, the near sacrifice of Isaac, is followed almost immediately by the disclosure of Sarah's death. Perhaps, rabbis speculated, a messenger from Satan informed Sarah of the impending sacrifice. Leaving Beersheba in a frantic attempt to learn the fate of her beloved son, she died of grief in Hebron before Abraham and Isaac had returned. In another version, Satan appeared to Sarah disguised as Isaac. "What did your father do to you?" she asked. He "bound me upon the altar and grasped a knife to cut my throat." But for God's intervention, Isaac revealed, "I would have been slaughtered." Struck by horror, her soul left her body, and she died. Some believed that

when Sarah learned from Satan that Isaac was not dead, “her joy was so exceedingly violent” that she instantly expired.

Sarah died in Kiriath-Arba, biblical Hebron, the ancient city whose origins Talmudic and midrashic sources date to 340 years after the Flood. In the Hebron highlands, with their abundant soft chalk and limestone outcroppings, cave burial was a common practice in antiquity. As early as 3000–2300 B.C.E., by some scholarly estimates, extended families were buried in these interconnected underground chambers. But as a nomadic wanderer, Abraham had no claim to land in Canaan, nor did he have any burial rights in Hebron. For Sarah’s burial place and, eventually, his own and those of their descendants, he yearned for the cave where Adam and Eve were entombed. Its special sanctity had been revealed only to him. Yet Abraham understood that even God’s promise of the entire land of Canaan had not eradicated the necessity of lawful possession and clear legal title.

So, with his period of mourning concluded, Abraham approached the sons of Het, representing the ruling tribe in Hebron, about a burial place for Sarah. They met at the city gate, a favored location in antiquity for transacting legal business. In this public space, merchants sold their wares, land was bought and sold, and disputes were resolved. With local elders present as witnesses, the necessary legitimacy was assured to thwart any future challenges.

The biblical account (Gen. 23) of Abraham’s purchase of the cave of Machpelah is conspicuous for its intricate and vivid detail about what may seem like nothing more than a mundane real estate transaction. But the carefully choreographed negotiations between Abraham and the sons of Het, and then with Ephron the property owner, do more than provide revealing glimpses of ancient legal and social mores. They illuminate a transaction with enduring consequences, for it transformed Abraham from a landless alien into a lawful property owner. Once title to Machpelah passed to Abraham, Jewish history in the Land of Israel had begun.

“I am a stranger and a sojourner with you,” Abraham conceded at the outset. As *ger v’toshav*, a resident alien who was not entitled to own land, he lacked the legal status to bury his dead. “Sell me a burial site among you,” he requested. The local Hittites responded to his request with evident respect—addressing Abraham as “my lord” and referring to him as “a mighty prince.” Generously, they urged him, “Bury your dead in the choicest of our burial places.” But their offer of a gift of burial privileges, unaccompanied by inheritable rights of ownership, was insufficient.

Bowing deferentially, Abraham reiterated his request and asked that it be conveyed to the actual titleholder: “You must agree to intercede for me with Ephron son of Zohar. Let him sell me the cave of Machpelah that he

owns, which is at the edge of his land . . . at the full price, for a burial site in your midst." But their intervention proved unnecessary. Ephron, who owned the cave and the surrounding land, stepped forward from among the men gathered at the gate to conduct the negotiations himself.

"Hear me," Ephron said, repeating the offer that Abraham had already declined, "I give it to you." But Abraham, insistent on legal ownership of a site whose unique sanctity he alone had glimpsed, rejected the generous gift, replying, "If only you would hear me out. Let me pay the price of the land." Once again declining Abraham's offer to purchase the cave, Ephron responded, "No, my lord, hear me; I give you the field and I give you the cave that is in it."

Why did Abraham and Ephron seem to have so much trouble hearing—that is, understanding—each other? Ephron, apparently, would give everything to Abraham—not only the cave but also the surrounding field—yet sell him nothing. No less puzzling, Abraham was determined to buy what he could possess at no cost. Why? Because to secure legal title in perpetuity, which Abraham required for an inheritable estate that would pass to his descendants, he had to buy the land, not receive it as a gift. Surely Ephron also knew this. Perhaps his apparent reluctance to sell was merely a clever bargaining tactic.

Bowing with humility before the assembled Hittites, Abraham insisted, "Let me pay the price of the land." Ephron casually responded, "A piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver—what is that between you and me?" Setting an inflated price even as he dismissed its importance, Ephron let it be known that he expected to be generously compensated for relinquishing title to his property. To secure a deeded burial plot that his descendants would inherit and to avoid any future claims against the land, Abraham needed to pay Ephron's full asking price, however exorbitant it might be. He well knew the unique value of the cave, while Ephron, it was said, "saw only darkness, which is why he sold it." Had Ephron known what Abraham knew about Machpelah, he surely would not have relinquished it. "But he certainly saw nothing in it," Rabbi Yuden bar Simon speculated in his fifth-century commentary, "for it was a thing which was not revealed except to its master."

The completed transaction, describing the site and its location in intricate detail, was precisely recorded:

So Ephron's land in Machpelah, near Mamre—the field with its cave and all the trees anywhere within the confines of that field—passed to Abraham as his possession . . . Then Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan. Thus the field with its cave passed from the Hittites to Abraham, as a burial site. (Gen. 23:17–20)

"No effort was spared," Bible scholar E. A. Speiser concludes, "to make the sale strictly legal and incontestable"—and to record the exact location of the land. Neither divine promise nor even Ephron's generous offer of a gift sufficed. Indisputable and perpetual title must be grounded in a valid contractual agreement transacted before witnesses, in public, in conformity with local law and custom. Only then did "Ephron's land," located vaguely "near Mamre," become Abraham's land, carefully identified as "the cave of the field of Machpelah," in Hebron, in the "land of Canaan." As a condition for buying Machpelah and as testimony to its importance, it would subsequently be claimed that Abraham knowingly relinquished the right to purchase Jerusalem.

The meticulous description of the location of Machpelah in Genesis is unmatched in the biblical narrative. It sharply contrasts with the conspicuously vague location in Deuteronomy of Moses' grave. There we merely read that "no one knows his burial place to this day." (So, too, his brother Aaron and sister Miriam were buried in unmarked wilderness graves.) Why was the Cave of Machpelah so exactly and repetitively identified, while the location of "the valley . . . near Beth-peor" remained so imprecise? The stark contrast could not have been accidental.

Were the strikingly different accounts meant to distinguish the enduring faith of Abraham, who did not question God's ways, from the rash assertiveness of Moses, whose severe punishment for challenging God was to see but not enter the land? Or might there have been an implicit admonition that sacred sites and the pilgrimages they invariably inspired properly belonged inside the promised homeland, not in the wilderness beyond? Perhaps it was considered inappropriate to honor the time of wilderness wandering, when the children of Israel had displayed conspicuous faithlessness and backsliding. So Moses' place of burial, somewhere east of the Jordan River but outside the land, "over there," would remain forever unknown, while the Machpelah burial place has remained a revered holy site ever since Sarah's entombment. Indeed, long before Jerusalem was first mentioned in the biblical text as a remote Jebusite hill-top town of little consequence (Josh. 15:63), Hebron had become a place of pilgrimage where sacred memory could be activated.

With the exchange of money for a deed of title, duly witnessed, ownership was transferred. Burying Sarah, Abraham took possession of his property. His acquisition was absolute, incontestable, and in perpetuity. Recorded in exacting detail, the Machpelah transaction would become the prototype for the laws of land acquisition that long afterward would be taught by Talmudic scholars to their students.

But if God had already promised the entire land of Israel to Abraham, why must he purchase any of it? According to the Book of Jubilees (a noncanonical Jewish text written in the second century B.C.E.), it was

the tenth and final test of Abraham's faith. His negotiations with Ephron and the Hittites demonstrated that he was truly worthy of divine favor. Polite and patient throughout, he did not complain to God about the burden of negotiating with Ephron during his time of grief, nor did he use a divine promise for bargaining leverage. In his final test, Abraham conducted elaborate and respectful negotiations with Ephron although the land already was promised to him.

As the burial tradition developed over the centuries, stories and legends abounded about the Cave of Machpelah, testifying to its special sanctity. It was said that when Abraham entered to bury Sarah, Adam and Eve, ashamed of their sins of disobedience in Eden, refused to remain entombed there. They did not wish to bear even greater shame from their proximity to Abraham, the righteous man who personified good deeds and loyalty to God. But Abraham soothed Adam with promises to pray for his soul. After entombing Sarah, he carried a still resistant Eve back to her place. With characteristic generosity of spirit, he restored tranquility to Sarah's final resting place.

Various explanations have been offered for the profusion of seemingly interchangeable place names in the biblical text: Machpelah, Mamre, Kiryat Arba, and Hebron. Machpelah refers to the cave and also to the field in which the cave is located. It means "double," but rabbis disagreed (predictably) over the meaning of a "double" cave. Were its chambers located inside or above each other? Did "double" even refer to the chambers or to the patriarchal and matriarchal couples who were buried there?

Mamre, a previous landowner of the terebinths, was said to have been Abraham's friend. Through his various ordeals, Mamre reminded Abraham of God's steadfastness and counseled obedience to divine command. Pleased with Mamre's advice, God rewarded him by appearing to Abraham "in Mamre's terebinths."

Kiryat Arba (meaning "the city of four") is variously identified with four confederated tribes that lived there and also with Arba, father of the fearsome giants encountered by the spies who scouted the promised land after the Israelite Exodus from Egypt. But the Babylonian Talmud suggests that Arba was "the city of the four couples"—Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Leah. Hebron, from the Hebrew root *hbr* meaning "friend" or "connection," may identify Abraham as a friend of God—or, alternatively, the connection of the burial cave, through its entrance to the Garden of Eden, to the divine realm.

Regardless of the multiple meanings, the detailed biblical recounting of the transaction would be endlessly cited to demonstrate Jewish ownership rights to *Me'arat HaMachpelah*. In an often-quoted observation, Rabbi Yuden bar Simon asserted that the purchase of Machpelah made it "one of three places about which the nations of the world cannot taunt Israel

saying, these are stolen lands." (Precisely such taunts may have prompted his assertion.) Like Joseph's tomb in Shechem, purchased by his father Jacob (Gen. 33:19), and Aravna's threshing floor in Jerusalem, bought by David for an altar to God (2 Sam. 18–25), Machpelah was purchased for a price explicitly stipulated in the Torah. Surely, that specificity was intended to remove any doubt about the legitimacy of ownership.

Scholars have speculated about the prominence of the Machpelah story in the biblical narrative. In his illuminating analysis of Genesis, Nahum Sarna suggested that the Machpelah site had already served as "a national shrine throughout the biblical period," even before the Genesis narrative emerged. With the Machpelah purchase, James L. Kugel writes, Abraham secured more than a burial plot. Thereafter, the claims of his descendants "rested not on any act of generosity on the part of the Hittites who owned the area, but on an actual purchase transacted in full compliance with legal standards."

The Machpelah purchase is a vital legitimization story, affirming the eternal claim of the Jewish people to the land where their revered ancestors were buried. There, according to the fourth-century Rabbi Pinhas ben Hama, the patriarchs and matriarchs made accessible a measure of their power and mercy to their faithful descendants. According to a passage in the *Zohar*, *Me'arat HaMachpelah* served as the gateway for righteous souls in transit from this world to the next. As they passed through, the four couples that were buried there rejoiced before God over their descendants. "To this day," according to Rabbi Hiyya, "Adam endures, gazing at the patriarchs twice a day, confessing his sins, showing them the site where he dwelled in supernal splendor."

Even after Abraham's death as "an old man, and full of years," the Cave of Machpelah reappeared in the biblical narrative. His sons Isaac and Ishmael were briefly reunited, after a prolonged estrangement, to bury their father in the tomb he had purchased. (Muslim claims to Machpelah rest on their asserted link to Abraham through Ishmael.) When Isaac died, after spending his final years in Hebron, his own sons also put aside their acrimonious rivalry to bury their father. Jacob is said to have offered Esau the choice between his share in Machpelah or monetary payment. Esau, removed from patriarchal succession once Isaac's blessing had passed to his brother, wondered, "What do I have to do with this cave?" Knowing that he could find a burial site anywhere, he relinquished his claim to Machpelah for a larger share of gold and silver.

Even these cursory burial narratives were sufficient to reaffirm Machpelah as the geographical focal point of patriarchal memory. Abraham, the "wandering Aramean" who had endlessly roamed through the promised land and beyond, and Isaac, who never ventured outside its borders, joined Sarah in the family burial site. With their deaths, the Cave of Machpelah was indelibly inscribed in the narrative of patriarchal history.

As an old man nearing death in Egypt, where he had finally been reunited with his beloved son Joseph, Jacob remembered his father and grandfather. Evidently fearful that the prolonged sojourn of his sons in Egypt had obliterated memory of their ancestors and severed their roots in the land of Canaan, he summoned Joseph to his side, imploring his assimilated son, "Do not bury me in Egypt. . . . Take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial-place." Pledging fidelity to his father's wishes, Joseph replied, "I will do as you have spoken." But even this assurance was insufficient to allay Jacob's apprehension that he would not only die in exile but also be buried there. "Swear to me," he begged Joseph, who reaffirmed his promise to fulfill his father's wish.

In his deathbed farewell to all his sons, Jacob once again expressed his fervent wish to be buried "with my fathers in the cave," which he precisely identified "in the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre, in the land of Canaan, the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site." He seemed burdened by his memory of burying his beloved wife Rachel "'on the road to Ephrath'—now Bethlehem," north of Hebron, not in the family tomb.

Jacob's expression of contrition and his insistent requests for reassurance from his sons may reveal some apprehension that he, too, might not be buried in the Machpelah cave. He left no doubt of his wishes, explicitly identifying Machpelah as the place where "Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah—the field and the cave in it, bought from the Hittites" (Gen. 49:29–32).

Jacob, suggests bioethicist Leon Kass, surely wished his own burial in Hebron to strengthen Joseph's feelings of attachment to Canaan. He framed his instructions with geographical precision ("in the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre, in the Land of Canaan"), legal authority ("the field that Abraham bought"), and family memory (where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah were already buried). Jacob had buried Leah there, according to the Book of Jubilees, "in the double cave near Rebekah his mother, to the left of the grave of Sarah, his father's mother." Such ancestral piety, Jacob devoutly wished, might encourage the eventual return of his descendants to their promised homeland.

But Jacob's death portended what he had most feared: a ceremonial Egyptian burial. Precisely as the Egyptians would honor one of their own venerated leaders, his body was "placed upon a couch of ivory, covered with gold, studded with gems, and hung with drapery of byssus and purple." Then Joseph, faithful—as his father had apprehensively anticipated—to the customs of his adopted land, commanded that Jacob's body be embalmed, a procedure that extended the Egyptian mourning period to seventy days. Only after Egyptian custom had been respected did Jo-

seph, clearly pulled between his father's wishes and the obligations of his own lofty position in the Egyptian royal court, finally approach Pharaoh to request permission to accompany his father's body back to Canaan for burial. Unlike his father, however, the son did not mention Machpelah, Mamre, Hebron, or Abraham's purchase. He was not inclined to highlight the geographical or cultural distinctiveness of his own family traditions.

Pharaoh, sufficiently reassured by Joseph's firm pledge to return to Egypt, ordered an elaborate state funeral. His motives may have been mixed: not only would he demonstrate his respect for Jacob, but he would also assert Egyptian royal authority. The array of Egyptian dignitaries that accompanied the mourners may have been Pharaoh's way of ensuring Joseph's return. Royal chariots and horsemen guided the long mournful journey through the Sinai wilderness, as if in anticipation of the Exodus from Egypt centuries later. It was said that fifty servants of Jacob cast myrrh and other perfumes along the way "so that the sons of Jacob trod upon the aromatic spices as they carried the body forward."

Following a circuitous route, the funeral procession curiously curled south of the Dead Sea to approach Hebron from the east (as though in rehearsal for Joshua's journey when he led the returning Israelites across the Jordan River). Then it halted beyond the river for yet another mourning period of seven days. Even the local Canaanites demonstrated their respect, but whether for Jacob or the display of Egyptian pageantry went unrecorded. Returning their father to their ancestral burial place in Hebron, Joseph and his brothers left Egypt behind, at least temporarily, to assume their own share of responsibility for maintaining the patriarchal tradition.

According to the Babylonian Talmud, the compendium of rabbinical discussions and decisions compiled around 500 C.E., Jacob's still resentful brother Esau appeared at Machpelah "to stir up strife" by demanding Jacob's burial place for himself. To disprove the validity of Esau's demand, Joseph dispatched his brother Naftali back to Egypt for the deed of title proving that Esau had relinquished his claim. Overhearing this unseemly fraternal dispute and wondering what it was about, their nephew Hushim was told that Esau would not let them bury their father. Enraged, Hushim seized a club "and struck Esau on the head so that his eyes fell out of their sockets and dropped at Jacob's feet." (In a slightly different rendition, Hushim cut off Esau's head with his sword, and it rolled past Jacob.) At that, "Jacob opened his eyes and smiled." The Jerusalem Talmud describes the burial placement according to the customary seating arrangement for a meal, with Abraham in the middle, his son Isaac on his right, and his grandson Jacob on his left.

With Jacob's entombment in the Cave of Machpelah, the patriarchal era of Israelite history ended. There is no further mention of *Me'arat*

HaMachpelah in the Hebrew Bible, which remains the sole textual source for Hebron in antiquity. But Jacob's deathbed insistence that he be buried with his fathers sealed its place in Jewish history, memory, and lore. The forefathers were dead, but their legacy would endure. Indeed, Dr. Kass writes, "It is Israel's memory of these ancestors, preserved through burial in a specific memorialized site *purchased* for such purpose, that will constitute Israel's sole link to the promised land through the four hundred years of exile." Even in exile, the sanctity of the Cave of Machpelah remained undiminished.

The claim of the Israelites to their divinely designated homeland depended, in the end, on powerful memories that the patriarchal and matriarchal tombs evoked. When, for example, the prophet Elijah was asked why he had not visited the yeshiva of Rabbi Judah Hanassi at his usual time, he was said to have replied that on the first day of the new month he always went to *Me'arat HaMachpelah* to awaken the patriarchs, each in turn, for morning prayers. Why did he not awaken them all together? Because, Elijah responded, "so great is their prayer that if they will all pray at once they might bring the Messiah before his time."

"Ancestral piety, burial, and *sacred memory*," Kass astutely observes, forever linked the Jewish people to the Machpelah burial caves, to the land in Hebron that Abraham's purchase had secured for posterity. Abraham had acquired not only a burial tomb but also "a place of memory and filial piety." It is "a special place where the ancestors may always 'dwell' among the living." Throughout the biblical period, Nahum Sarna suggests, *Me'arat HaMachpelah* served as "a national shrine." Ever since, Jews have been drawn to the tombs of their patriarchs and matriarchs to express the deepest sources of their attachment to the Land of Israel. If Jerusalem, over time (and much later), became God's city (Ps. 48:1-3), Hebron was the burial place of the human agents of divine purpose. Long after the death of Jacob, Machpelah continued to evoke powerful memories. It surely is an irony of history that the fiercest confrontations over property ownership in the Land of Israel continue to occur in Hebron, where Jewish history began with a mundane yet still consequential real estate transaction.

Hebron reappeared, briefly but suggestively, in the biblical narrative of the Exodus. As the Israelites approached the land of Canaan, God commanded Moses to send spies (or scouts) to report on the land they were about to enter. (There are inconsistencies in the biblical account: according to Num. [13:1-2], God commanded Moses to send them; but in Deut. [1:22-24], the initiative came from the Israelites themselves.) The spies, one from each tribe, were instructed to discover whether "the people who dwell in it [are] strong or weak, few or many? Is the country in which they dwell good or bad? Are the towns they live in open or fortified? Is the soil

rich or poor?" They were also told to "take pains to bring back some of the fruit of the land" (Num. 13:18–20).

The explorations of the spies revealed that the land of Canaan was indeed bountiful, truly a land of "milk and honey." They would return with pomegranates, figs, and a gigantic cluster of grapes, so large that two men were required to carry it suspended from a pole. (More than 2,000 years later, this image of abundance was proudly adopted by the Travel Ministry of the State of Israel.) Wine pressed from those very grapes, it was said, sufficed for all the sacrificial ceremonies of the Israelites during their forty years of wilderness wandering.

The biblical text recounts, "And they went up into the Negev and came to Hebron" (Num. 13:22). Symbolically, it was "a return home," to the only identifiable place in the entire land of Canaan that already belonged, by divine promise and legal purchase, to the Israelites. Perhaps the spies intended to pay homage to their patriarchs and matriarchs. As Bible scholar Richard Elliott Friedman suggests, "It might have been the perfect place to begin Israel's return to the land." But there they encountered the Anakites, a fearsome tribe of strong men, sons of Anak. Their size and power identified them as *nephilim* (giants). They were so tall, according to legend, that the sun reached no higher than their ankles. Their cities were "fortified and very large." The spies were disheartened, indeed terrified, by their encounters with the local Canaanites.

But Caleb remained faithful to God's promise of the land. According to the Babylonian Talmud, he separated himself from the other spies and "went up"—suggesting a spiritual no less than a physical ascent—to Hebron. While his companions quivered in fear at the mere glimpse of the Anakites, Caleb sought inspiration at the patriarchal graves. Prostrating himself, Caleb implored his ancestors, "Send up prayers now, my fathers, for me, that God in his mercy may keep me far from the counsel of the spies."

Perhaps Caleb had seen something in the *nephilim* that his frightened companions had missed. Literary scholar Elana Pardes wonders imaginatively whether these terrifying images might actually have been the "tall ghosts of the distant forefathers." To the spies, Canaan—especially Hebron—was "a shadowy, frightful realm, dominated by the dead," the patriarchal past from which they were remote, even estranged. But Caleb, making the pilgrimage to Machpelah that signified his embrace of the patriarchal tradition, was fortified for the challenges of conquest that lay ahead. At the patriarchal tombs, he grasped the full meaning of God's promise of the land to his ancestors. Caleb's pilgrimage is the earliest recorded affirmation of *Me'arat HaMacheplah* as the revered holy site that it has remained for Jews ever since.

On their return to the wilderness camp of the Israelites, the spies reported their experiences in breathless, anxious cadences: Canaan was "a

land that eats up its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are men of great stature. And there we saw the Nephilim, the sons of Anak who come of the Nephilim: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight." (Num. 13:32–33) Men of small stature and little faith, disregarding divine assurances, they insisted that the Israelite journey of return was doomed.

The doubt and hesitation among the spies—only Caleb and Joshua remained steadfast in their mission and faith—sparked a panicky loss of will among the Israelites. To such "grasshoppers," not yet spiritually liberated from Egyptian servitude, it seemed safer to reject their divinely ordained destiny, even if that meant the return to slavery in Egypt. Caleb and Joshua exhorted them to stand firm, but their murmurings and wailings consigned the wilderness generation to forty years of wandering, never to enter the promised land. Only then would the Children of Israel, under Joshua's command, finally embrace the patriarchal legacy, as Caleb had done at Machpelah.

The frightened spies, punished for their faithlessness, died in a plague. But Caleb, "imbued with a different spirit," was rewarded for remaining steadfast (Num. 14:24). Moses assured him that he would return to the land "and [that] his offspring shall hold it as a possession." Caleb waited until he was an old man for that promise to be fulfilled. But on the eve of battle, he assured Joshua that he was "as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me." Even though the Canaanite cities were "great and fortified," Caleb requested the land of the Anakim for his inheritance.

Led by Caleb, the Israelites fought a great battle in Hebron: "and they took it, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and its king . . . and all the souls that were in it; he left none remaining." According to the Book of Joshua, Caleb drove Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmi, the sons of Anak, from the city. With the king of Hebron hanging from a tree, the valiant warrior reminded Joshua, "I wholly followed the Lord my God. And Moses swore on that day, saying, surely the land on which your feet have trodden shall be your inheritance, and your children's forever" (Josh. 10:36–37, 14:8–15).

Joshua honored Moses' promise. Blessing his steadfast comrade, he "gave Hebron to Caleb . . . for an inheritance." (Josh. 15:14–15) With the award of Hebron to Caleb, the patriarchal legacy was revitalized. In time Caleb's tribe, the tribe of Judah, would relinquish to the priestly Levites "the city of Arba the father of Anaq, which city is Hebron, in the hill country of Judah, with its pasture lands round about it." But Caleb retained "the fields of the city, and its villages" for his descendants. The subsequent designation of Hebron as a priestly city and one of three cities of refuge west of the Jordan River where the right of asylum was

granted to someone who committed involuntary manslaughter affirmed its historical stature.

Under pressure from neighboring states and hostile peoples, the decentralized tribal leadership of the Israelites under the Judges, without a unified administration or an army, could not endure. After centuries of Egyptian domination, the land south of Jerusalem began to coalesce into what would become known as the Kingdom of Judah. The Israelites, already yearning to become “like all the nations,” wanted a king to lead them. God granted their request, but King Saul’s flagrant disregard of divine command led to his defeat and self-inflicted death in battle against the Philistines. After David, his heroic young successor, sang his mournful lament for Saul and his beloved friend Jonathan (“They were swifter than eagles, and stronger than lions. . . . How have the warriors fallen in the midst of the battle”), he turned to God to ask, “Where shall I go up?” God answered, “To Hebron.”

David, like Abraham and Caleb before him, heeded a divine summons to Hebron. Why Hebron? Ancient claims aside, one of his wives, Abigail, had previously been married to Nabal, a wealthy and powerful personage in the Calebite clan, whose capital was Hebron. On Nabal’s death, Bible scholar Jon D. Levenson suggests, David may have taken Abigail as his wife to secure monarchical legitimacy. With his wives and sons and their households, David “settled in Hebron,” the city of refuge nearest to the villages where he had fled to escape Saul’s wrath. Securing his claim to Hebron, the patriarchal holy site and capital of the Calebite patrimony, he extended his rule throughout Judah and, eventually, over a united Israel.

The Book of Samuel recounts,

And all the tribes of Israel came to David in Hebron, and they said, “Here we are, your bone and your flesh are we. Time and again in the past when Saul was king over us you were the one who led Israel into the fray, and the Lord said to you, It is you who will shepherd my people Israel and it is you who will be prince over Israel.”

And all the elders of Israel came to the King in Hebron, and King David made a pact with them in Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David as king over Israel. (2 Sam. 5:1–4)

Hebron was the vital link—both geographical and spiritual—between the biblical ancestors and the first Jewish commonwealth. It was, Benjamin Mazar writes, the “centre of peculiar holiness—connected to the ancient forefathers.” With his tribal base in Hebron, David could now expand his influence over the hill country south of Jerusalem and west into the Shepheleh region. There he could secure his claim to be the rightful inheritor of the patriarchal tradition. Skeptical modern scholars perceive

David as merely a “local strongman,” proclaimed by Hebron elders as their chieftain. Even so, he now held the position that would catapult him to royal leadership of a unified Israelite kingdom.

During David’s reign (ca. 1010–1003 B.C.E.), archaeological evidence suggests, Hebron, nestled into the contours of the surrounding hills, constituted a relatively small area of perhaps five to eight acres. Located in “a remote and primitive highland kingdom,” fragmented among farmers, shepherds, and competing clans, it was capable of supporting a population of 500 to 1,000 people. But as a designated priestly city, it was relatively advanced for its time. There, the Levites had developed their own administrative system that could be absorbed within David’s rule. It comprised “men of ability [who] had the oversight of Israel westward of the Jordan for all the work of the Lord and for the service of the King” (1 Chron. 26:30–32). They constituted an important power base, now pledged to the royal authority of King David.

Strongly fortified, with a solitary gate, Hebron’s strategic location ensured its importance. A walled city, its gate (as in Abraham’s time) still served for gatherings of elders, judicial trials, and, now, a place where the king resolved important disputes. It seems plausible that the designation of Hebron as the place from which David, at the age of thirty, would inaugurate his kingship was meant, at least in part, to reflect the special honor and respect accorded to an ancient religious city of distinctive sanctity. The pinnacle of Hebron’s ancient history occurred when it became King David’s royal capital, binding the new ruler to patriarchal traditions.

Little is recorded about David’s seven-year reign in Hebron. We are told that he waged brutal warfare against the rebellious heirs of the house of Saul: “and they killed them and hewed off their hands and their feet and hung them up by the pool in Hebron.” (2 Sam. 4:11) During the fighting, Absalom, David’s ambitious and conniving son, surrendered not only his dream of becoming king in Hebron but also his life. But Hebron had liabilities as capital of the unified kingdom that David was determined to establish. Ruling from Hebron, he risked losing the loyalty of the northern tribes of Israel. He might placate the northerners by relocating his throne to Shechem, but then the Judeans in the south would feel abandoned, even betrayed.

To consolidate his kingdom, David needed a neutral site, beyond the boundaries of any tribal group, that the people of both Judah and Israel would respect. From Jerusalem, the Jebusite town on the border between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin that had played a negligible role in Jewish history until then, he could rule over a unified kingdom. Located atop a mountain, astride major trade routes from Shechem to Beersheba and from Jaffa to Amman, Jerusalem offered important political, strategic, and commercial advantages.

To justify the transfer of royal authority from Hebron to Jerusalem, a legend arose that mirrored Abraham's acquisition of *Me'arat HaMachpelah*. It recounted that the Jebusites were descended from the sons of Het, who had deeded Machpelah to Abraham on condition that their heirs never would be forcibly dispossessed from Jerusalem. Alerted to Abraham's promise, which had been engraved on a brass plaque, David offered the Jebusites 600 shekels in payment for the city. They accepted. (According to the Book of Samuel, however, David purchased only a threshing floor and some oxen for fifty shekels.) Whether or not this story was a retro-active attempt to legitimate David's forcible conquest of Jerusalem, his relocation of the monarchy there demonstrated, as Carol Meyers writes, "strategic brilliance in establishing a capital city outside the traditional areas of any existing tribal groups."

Once David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and located the royal palace there, Hebron receded in political, if not sacred, significance. With Mount Moriah as the legendary site of the Akedah, Jerusalem had its own link to the patriarchal era. There, as in Hebron, Abraham had been severely tested by God; in both places, he had demonstrated his abiding faith. With the building of the Temple by David's son Solomon, Benjamin Mazar suggests, Jerusalem became unrivaled as "the national-religious and political centre of Israel and as the symbol of the unity of the nation."

When David died, it was recorded that he had reigned for forty years: "seven years he reigned in Hebron, and thirty-three years he reigned in Jerusalem." (1 Kings 2:11) Now the capital cities of the first Jewish commonwealth became forever linked in history. Indeed, it was recorded in Mishna *Yoma* that the time of morning sacrifice in the Temple in Jerusalem was determined by whether light was yet visible in the eastern sky over Hebron.

Fragmentary evidence suggests that even after David's reign Hebron continued to flourish. Its inhabitants lived in multistoried four-room dwellings, amply supplied with storage and cooking pottery, "elegant black burnished juglets," and oil lamps. They kept their animals in adjacent stables surrounding a common courtyard. For strategic and political reasons, Hebron remained a prized target for successive invaders. Intermittently under siege, it was pillaged and burned during Solomon's reign when the Egyptian army marched through Judah on its way to Jerusalem.

Toward the end of the eighth century B.C.E., after the conquest of Israel in the north, Sennacherib's powerful Assyrian army threatened the reign of King Hezekiah. Preparing for an invasion of Judah and the possibility of an extended siege, Hezekiah fortified Jerusalem. The extraordinary Siloam tunnel was dug through 500 meters of solid rock to reach the Gihon spring

outside the city walls, thereby ensuring the city's residents an adequate water supply. As part of a major administrative reorganization of his kingdom to cope with the impending crisis, Hezekiah designated four strategically located cities for storage of emergency provisions. He selected Socoh in the Shepelah region, Ziph in the Judean wilderness, "*mmst*" (perhaps Mamshet in the Negev), and Hebron. Its strategic location and economic productivity made Hebron a vital town in Hezekiah's defense and provisioning plans. For the same reasons, however, it was an inviting target in Sennacherib's plans for conquest.

In nearby Lachish, across the mountain range west of Hebron, large storage jars were produced in considerable quantity. Nearly two feet tall, they had a ten-gallon capacity that was suitable for ample reserves of oil, wine, and grain. Bearing stamped seals on their handles, displaying either a four-winged flying scarab beetle or a two-winged sun disk, they were specifically identified by city. Hundreds of these stamped handles, reading *lmlk hbrn* (*l'melekh Hebron*—belonging to the king, Hebron), have been discovered at ancient Judean archaeological sites.

The storage jars, a scholar speculates, "were manufactured under royal supervision . . . certified by official inspectors of size and quality with their signet rings; and filled with provisions and sent to principal store-cities throughout Judah." These standardized vessels, along with evidence of the contemporaneous production of scales and weights, suggest an emerging "kingdom-wide network of regulation and communication," an important embryonic stage of royal centralization.

So Hebron—once the city of the patriarchs, then a city of refuge and a Levitical city, and then David's capital—reemerged briefly during Hezekiah's reign as a vital administrative center. But the Assyrian conquest was brutal. Sennacherib proudly described its destructive force on a clay prism found in Nineveh: "I laid siege to 45 of his strong cities, walled forts" (doubtlessly including Hebron), conquering them with the use of "well-stamped [earth] ramps, and battering-rams," along with "mines [and] breeches as well as sapper work." He boasted of driving out 200,000 people, "young and old, male and female."

After the Assyrian conquest, Hebron's history once again becomes murky and elusive. The city was all but demolished in 589 B.C.E. by the invading Babylonians, who drove its residents into exile. Although some Israelites may have remained behind, Hebron was repopulated by the neighboring Edomites. Yet when the exiles returned from Babylonia nearly a century later, Nehemiah recorded, they discovered that "some of the children of Judah" still "dwelt at Kiryat Arba, and in its hamlets."

Intermittently occupied by foreign powers thereafter, Hebron was assaulted by the Maccabees during their second-century revolt against

Hellenistic rule. The Tel Rumeida site of biblical Hebron finally was abandoned after nearly 2,000 years of settlement, repeated invasion, and destruction. Captured by the Hasmoneans, Hebron once again became an Israelite city: "And Judah and his brethren went forth, and fought against the children of Esau in the land toward the south; and he smote Hebron and the villages thereof, and burned the towers thereof round about." (1 Mac. 5:65–66) Its 1,000-year-old fortress wall was "pried apart and pushed over," with only the gate tower remaining. Surviving inhabitants spread down the slope from Tel Rumeida into the valley of Machpelah, where the discovery of several pottery kilns suggests that Hebron once again became a bustling, productive town, a commercial center no less than a sacred site.

The biblical narrative of Hebron in Jewish antiquity, as spare as it became after Jacob's burial, has in some important respects been affirmed by modern archaeological discoveries. Archaeologists have identified Tel Rumeida, a terraced hill half a mile south of Machpelah comprising some fifteen acres (approximately the size of King David's Jerusalem), as the most probable site of biblical Hebron. Pottery fragments and remnants of a mud-brick wall suggest that a community existed there even before 3000 B.C.E., with some inhabitants living in caves and others in houses. Temporarily abandoned, it was rebuilt in 2600–2300 B.C.E., surrounded by a substantial wall some twenty feet thick, with large stones at the base more than three feet in length. The wall is believed to have enclosed the first fortified city of Hebron, even before the patriarchal era.

Tel Rumeida seems to have experienced a slow transformation between 2000 and 1550 B.C.E. from a place of seminomadic occupation to a more established settlement. A newer, higher wall was constructed from large uncut stones, some more than six feet long (similar to those excavated in Jerusalem dating from 1750 to 1650 B.C.E.). A break in the wall, perhaps thirty feet wide, marked the possible location of the city gate. The remains of the gate tower, once nearly twenty feet high, could be where Abraham and Ephron conducted their negotiations over Machpelah. The recent excavation in Tel Rumeida of a four-room house, just large enough for a nuclear family, is consistent with its development into a settled community.

The construction of the new wall may have marked the evolution of a small village—known, perhaps, as Kiryat Arba—into the walled city of Hebron. Its fortifications were similar to those discovered by archaeologists at Megiddo, Shiloh, and Jericho. Although its inhabitants, except for Ephron, remain anonymous, the discovery of a Ramses II scarab in Tel Rumeida excavations suggests a possible Egyptian presence among the Canaanites who lived there.

Tel Rumeida excavations in the 1960s, conducted by Philip Hammond of the Princeton Theological Seminary, revealed that at least part of Hebron had once experienced violent destruction, precisely as the Book of Joshua described. An accumulation of ash and charcoal was consistent with the biblical recounting of Israelites burning an enemy city. Elsewhere, however, abandonment of the city seemed to have occurred without evidence of destruction; ceramic remains suggested a more gradual process of Israelite displacement of the local population. Based on his own excavations in Hebron twenty years later, the skeptical Israeli archaeologist Avi Ofer suggested that “groups of diverse origins,” not otherwise identifiable and perhaps descended from local Canaanites but unified by common enemies, may have developed their own local traditions about Joshua and Caleb.

Fragmentary archaeological evidence aside, the Hebrew Bible remains the sole textual source for ancient Hebron. The earliest explicit reference outside the Bible to “Israel”—referring to the people, not the place—was the “victory stele” of the Egyptian pharaoh Merneptah, erected at Thebes during the third year of his reign (ca. 1210 B.C.E.). It boldly, if prematurely, proclaimed that “Israel is laid waste; its seed is not.” From this evidence, scholars have concluded that the Israelites already were a distinctive people, if not yet living within definitive geographical boundaries. The recurrent mention of Hebron in the Book of Genesis suggests, at the very least, a vividly remembered tradition of its continuing significance among the people who knew themselves—and who were beginning to be known by others—as “Israel.”

It is revealing that the first plot of land said to have been acquired by the ancient Israelites in the land of Canaan was for a grave. Noting the usage of *kever*, the Hebrew word both for “grave” and for “womb,” Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, now living in nearby Efrat, writes, “The grave is also the womb; the past is mother to the future.” Reminded of their past in Hebron, Abraham’s descendants would build their future in the Land of Israel on reverence for the final resting place of their patriarchs and matriarchs.

Despite the ascendancy of Jerusalem as the nation’s revered capital and site of the First and Second Temples, Hebron remained irreplaceable in the construction of Jewish memory. Preservation of the graves of the patriarchs and matriarchs as a Jewish holy site meant that any Jew, however far removed in time from Abraham, Sarah, and their progeny, could, like Caleb, return to Machpelah for consolation and inspiration. There, at the very source of Jewish history in the Land of Israel, the deepest memory of the historical narrative of the Jewish people could be activated.

Recent excavations at Tel Rumeida—including a wine press and granary—offer a glimpse of the tangible reality of Hebron’s ancient past.

Amid the vicissitudes of early Jewish history in the Land of Israel, wondrous and tragic moments occurred there. Three thousand years later, a Jewish community in Hebron clings tenaciously to the city of its biblical ancestors. For these Jews, the first landholding of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel, the burial place of their patriarchs and matriarchs, and King David's first capital city are deeply embedded in memory. In Hebron, as nowhere else, Jews can return to their most ancient remembered past.

2



Holy Site

Some ancient Israelite holy sites—the terebinths of Mamre and Shechem, the land of Moriah where Abraham took Isaac, and even the “burning” bush in Sinai—were places where humans encountered the divine. Others were associated with death and burial. The Israelite tradition, identifying the precise location of the graves of the patriarchs and matriarchs, elevated *Me’arat HaMachpelah* to special significance—complemented by Rachel’s Tomb “on the road to Efrata” near Bethlehem and Joseph’s Tomb in Shechem. Beginning with Caleb and ever since, Jewish pilgrims have made the “sacred journey” to the Cave of Machpelah to be comforted and inspired by their biblical ancestors.

Little is known about the patriarchal tombs before the Roman conquest of Palestine. In 37 B.C.E., when Herod became the king of Roman Judea after the Hasmonean dynasty crumbled, he authorized a massive building program. Whether to moderate suspicion of his foreign political loyalties, to solidify the allegiance of his Jewish subjects, or simply to glorify his own name in history remains unknown. But the impregnable fortresses of Herodion and Masada, a spacious seaport at Caesarea, and the splendor of a new royal palace and rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem testified to the grandeur of Herod’s architectural imagination, political vision, and determination to permanently stamp the landscape with his distinctive imprint.

Herod’s extravagant building project included a massive enclosure for the Machpelah burial tombs: a rectangular edifice measuring nearly 200 feet long, 100 feet wide, and more than forty feet high. Each of its hewn dolomite stones was more than three feet tall and weighed several tons; at

least one measured nearly twenty-five feet in length. As any contemporary visitor can instantly recognize, they were virtually identical to the stones used by Herod's builders for the Temple enclosure in Jerusalem, from which only the Western Wall remains. Perhaps the Machpelah structure served as its model. Similar decorative and structural details of the walls and the geometry of the interiors support the Herodian linkage between the Machpelah enclosure and the Temple esplanade in Jerusalem. Inside the Hebron structure, new cenotaphs were built to mark the patriarchal and matriarchal tombs—with Abraham placed between Jacob and Isaac and Sarah between Rebekah and Leah. Josephus, the Jewish renegade turned Roman officer and historian, especially admired the cenotaphs for their "fine marble and exquisite workmanship."

But Hebron's new architectural splendor could not protect the city from military disaster. During the Great Revolt against Roman rule, which began in 66 C.E., Judea became a bloody battleground. Hebron was briefly conquered by Simeon bar Giora, leader of the Jewish Zealots, but according to Josephus, an army of 40,000 men commanded by Simon of Gerasa took Hebron in a "sudden attack" and "laid waste the whole country." It was followed by a devastating assault led by the Roman commander Cerealius: as Josephus wrote, "What multitude and young men were left [in Hebron] he slew, and burnt down the city."

Seventy years later, during the doomed Bar Kokhba uprising, a surviving remnant of Hebron Jews joined the brigades of their messianic leader. But in successive Roman assaults, the remains of their city were razed and plundered. In a final humiliation, Hadrian brought captured Jewish rebels to the marketplace in Hebron, where they were sold as slaves "at the price of four for a measure of barley." (According to another account, the Terebinth market just north of Hebron was so crowded with Jewish fighters enslaved by Hadrian that they were sold for merely a horse's ration.) Under his command, the hill country of Judea was virtually emptied of its Jewish population. Only a handful of Jewish villages south of Hebron survived.

Palestine, as the land was newly renamed by its Roman conquerors, was ravaged. Its major Jewish communities had been decimated, Jerusalem was in ruins, and the Temple was destroyed. With their numbers vastly depleted, Jewish survivors were concentrated largely in the Galilee region to the north. No Jews remained in Hebron. If the sanctity of Machpelah was too deeply embedded in the collective memory of the Jewish people for the City of the Patriarchs to be forgotten, Jews were nonetheless forced to share and ultimately yield it to competing religious faiths backed by stronger armies than the Jews possessed.

With the rise of Christianity, Hebron began to attract pilgrims who yearned to experience "sacred intimacy" with the revered ancestors

whom they claimed to share with Jews. With Constantine's recognition of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, Palestine assumed new theological importance. Christian pilgrims, eager to retrace the steps of their Savior, began to explore the places associated with the life and death of Jesus: in Jerusalem the site of the Holy Sepulcher and the Cave of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives and in nearby Bethlehem where the Cave of the Nativity was located.

The emergence of Jerusalem as a Christian holy city seems to have sparked the interest of pilgrims in the patriarchal legacy in Hebron. The loss of Jewish political power and the dispersion of the population had prompted rabbinical opposition to the association of gravesites with biblical figures, but that was hardly a deterrent to Christian visitors. Just north of Hebron, Mamre emerged as an important destination on the pilgrim itinerary.

At the beginning of the third century, Julius Africanus, a native of Palestine, mentioned the terebinth and nearby altar where offerings were brought to honor the memory of Abraham. But Eutropia, Emperor Constantine's mother-in-law, discovered to her dismay that "the place which is called after the oak of Mamre . . . is defiled in every possible way by certain superstitious persons" and the "foolishness of impious men." Responding to her alarming description of pagan idols "set up on the site of that tree" and "foul sacrifices" at the altar, Constantine relayed the complaint of his "most saintly" mother-in-law—according to some accounts, it was his mother, Helena, who came on a pilgrimage in 326—to the bishops of Palestine. "Surely it is a grave impiety indeed," he asserted, "that holy places should be defiled by the stain of unhallowed impurities."

The "defilement"—or pagan appropriation—of venerated holy sites throughout Palestine prompted Constantine to order the construction of basilicas to mark them as places of Christian sanctity. He commanded the eradication of all "sacrilegious abominations" at Mamre, "for you are not unaware that there the God of the universe first appeared to Abraham and conversed with him." There, too, "the Saviour himself with the two angels" had delivered the divine "promise to Abraham of his future seed," promising Abraham that he would be "the father of a multitude of nations." With the rise of Christianity, divine prophecy was moving closer to fulfillment.

According to Eusebius, bishop of Caesaria and Constantine's biographer, the emperor wanted the Mamre site to "be adorned with an unpolluted building, a basilica, that it may be made [a] place fit for the assembly of holy men." The site, to be known as "Terebinthus," should be "kept clear of every defilement and restored to its ancient holy state."

The spread of Christianity, symbolized by Constantine's empire, would mark "a return to the pure religion of the patriarchs."

Eusebius was not enthusiastic about places that were reputed to affirm the truth of the biblical narrative. But he deferred to Constantine's insistence that Mamre possessed "ancient holiness," which faithful Christians must restore and respect. In what now became "Christian" Mamre, the new basilica, according to a Bordeaux pilgrim who visited in 333, was "exceptionally beautiful." Set in a large courtyard, it faced an atrium that enclosed Abraham's tree, well, and altar, where pilgrims could "behold in their minds the faithful patriarch" at the very site where the Christian Savior, embodied in the three strangers, had visited him. There, pilgrims could also admire a visual representation of the momentous encounter between Abraham and the angels.

Mamre became a major religious and commercial center during the Roman and Byzantine eras. With such assertive Christian claims to Jewish history and holy sites, "the newly confident Christianity" of the Roman Empire was vividly on display. Just as Jerusalem was transformed into a conspicuously Christian city, so the Jewish landscape around Hebron began to recede. A few kilometers south of Mamre, it became "a small, wretched town" of little importance.

The emergence of Mamre as a Christian holy site, yet a place where flagrant displays of pagan worship continued, prompted a rabbinical edict prohibiting Jews from attending the exuberant annual festival that had become a major tourist attraction. It may have been around this time that Rabbi Judah ben Simeon declared that Machpelah in Hebron, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and the tomb of Joseph in Shechem, according to the biblical text all duly purchased and paid for, could not be taken from Jews with claims that they were stolen land. But neither the rabbinical edict nor the rabbi's pronouncement seemed to have had any discernible effect on the Christianization of Mamre or the presence of Jews at the popular annual pagan festival.

The Mamre fair, observed by the fifth-century ecclesiastical historian Sozomen, was "diligently frequented by all nations: by the Jews because they boast of their descent from the patriarch Abraham; by the pagans because angels there appeared to men; and by Christians because He who has lately revealed himself through the virgin for the salvation of mankind once appeared there to the pious man." There, Sozomen wrote, "some pray to the God of all; some call upon the angels, pour out wine, or burn incense, or offer an ox, or he-goat, a sheep or a cock."

As a "many-layered holy place," shared by pagans, Christians, and Jews, Mamre was unique. It was mentioned even more frequently in pilgrim accounts than Machpelah. The Mamre festival, known as the "Fair of the Oak," merged religion and commerce, always a potent combination.

It included a "pious" feast venerating Abraham and the various divine and angelic signs associated with his life. Sacrifices were offered, men abstained from intimacy with their wives, and even during their enthusiastic celebratory processions, Sozomen noted, participants "did not act at all licentiously." The modern discovery of ancient coins at the Mamre site suggests that pilgrims came from as far away as Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople to visit "Abraham's Oak," pray in its new Christian basilica, and savor the varied pleasures of the festival.

Despite rabbinical edicts, Jews continued to visit Mamre. Their presence was noted by a pilgrim from Piacenza in northern Italy, visiting around 570, who mentioned a partition in Constantine's basilica where "the Christians came in on one side and Jews on the other, and they use much incense." There he witnessed a commemoration, "with much devotion," of the burial of Jacob. "Jews from all over the country congregate for this, too great a crowd to count." According to Antonius Placentinus, another sixth-century visitor, Jews "come in untold numbers to prostrate themselves on the patriarchs' tombs." Jews and Christians, Antonius Martyr wrote not long afterward, entered by separate gates "to burn incense" at their respective places of worship. Some time during the sixth century, in a gesture of reconciliation, the emperor Justinian permitted Jews to build a synagogue within the Machpelah enclosure.

With their political aspirations crushed and their community decimated, the fate of Hebron Jews over the centuries rose and fell with the repeated and often violent transfers of power in Palestine from Roman to Byzantine to Muslim to Crusader to Mameluk to Ottoman rule. Some time after the Muslim conquest in 640, Hebron became known as al-Khalil, the city of Abraham the friend. But Hebron is not mentioned in the literature of Muslim conquest, nor do testimonies of Muslim visits or pilgrimages to Hebron exist before the tenth century. Then stories began to circulate recounting explorations of the Cave of Machpelah and occasional sightings of the bodies of the patriarchs. A Muslim geographer described the patriarchal tombs and noted the abundance of local fruit. Other descriptions mentioned an inn, funded by the *waqf*, which provided lentils and olive oil to pilgrims and other hungry visitors. During the reign of the Abassid caliph al-Muqtadir (908–932), Joseph's tomb, by Jewish tradition located in Shechem, was "discovered," and a domed structure was built over it, adjacent to the wall enclosing the patriarchal tombs.

Both Christian and Muslim sources from the twelfth century recount similar stories of two monks who witnessed the arrival of Muslims in Hebron. "Amazed to see the strong and handsome structures of the walls" that surrounded the Machpelah caves, the invaders were frustrated by their inability to locate an entrance. But "Jews happened to come," promising "to show the site of the holy cave and the place where

they hid the keys." In return, they received a letter of permission, issued by Caliph Omar, to build a synagogue adjacent to the Herodian wall.

The opening of a Jewish cemetery in Hebron suggests the revival of a Jewish community there; for a time, Jews may even have enjoyed supervisory rights at the burial caves. Documents discovered in the Cairo *genizah* at the end of the nineteenth century traced two Hebron Jewish families through several generations. One of them, who apparently held an inherited position for the "people of the tombs of our forefathers," was responsible for maintaining *Me'arat HaMachpelah* as a Jewish holy site. Otherwise, there is no evidence of a Jewish population of any significance in the Hebron region.

Some early Islamic sources claimed that the prophet Muhammad, mounted on al-Buraq, had stopped in Hebron during his night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem. He was said to have left behind a shoe inside the Byzantine basilica, which was then converted by his followers into the mosque that was built over the burial caves. Like the Western Wall in Jerusalem, identified by Muslims as the place where al-Buraq was tethered, Hebron was absorbed within Islamic tradition as a Muslim holy site. Under Muslim rule, Jews became a "protected" but inferior people, *dhimmis* from whom submissive behavior and high taxes were required. But, at least for a time, the right of Jews to visit Machpelah and pray there seems to have been recognized.

Jews continued to make pilgrimages to Hebron. Eli ha-Kohen ben Ezekiel from Jerusalem recounted his visit to the graves of the patriarchs around 1060, followed by communal prayer for "the prince [*sar*] of the congregation" when the Torah was opened for reading (suggesting the presence of a synagogue near Machpelah and a minyan of at least ten adult males). According to a Catholic monk, "It is impossible to describe in what reverence that people of unbelievers held this place." Later in the century, Rabbi Saadiah, a third-generation Hebronite and head of the small community, became known as "a friend of the graves of the patriarchs, of blessed memory." Among his other responsibilities, he helped guard the tombs and provided assistance to those who came to pray. (His more entrepreneurial son Abraham exported Hebron cheese for sale in Egypt.) It was evidently an impoverished community: in a sorrowful letter, Saadia reported that his family had lost an ass worth fifteen dinars between Hebron and Ascelon and that they had no bread to eat. But Avon ben Sedaqa disclosed that his Jewish business partner, while in Hebron to visit the graves of the patriarchs, found time to complete a deal to buy wheat. In Hebron, evidently, piety, poverty, and profit overlapped.

With the Crusader conquest at the end of the eleventh century, the Jewish community was once again expelled from Hebron. Jews fled to nearby Ascelon (modern Ashkelon) and to Bilbays in Egypt. (Saadia's son Abra-

ham, the cheese exporter, became head of the Bilbays community.) The synagogue became a monastery, and the mosque inside Machpelah was converted into the "Church of St. Abraham." By the middle of the twelfth century, Christian pilgrims arrived in sufficient number for cells to be built on the roof of the Machpelah enclosure to accommodate them. Fruit from the lush local orchards, with their groves of olive and fig trees and abundant grapevines, was harvested to ease their hunger. In a daily meal to commemorate Abraham's hospitality, described as "one of the most wonderful things in the world," a cook, a baker (assisted by slave girls), and an array of attendants served bread and olives, lentils with olive oil, and raisins to hundreds of people. Then as now, tourism exacted a toll from the local environment. When Bishop Arculf visited the revered oak at Mamre, he discovered that its trunk was "scarred and hacked about with axes, because small splinters of it are taken to many parts of the world as venerable mementoes."

Still, Jews were permitted to visit Hebron under Christian rule, and a flurry of pilgrimage accounts from the mid-twelfth century recorded the reverence inspired by these visits. The eminent physician and philosopher Maimonides, whose *Guide of the Perplexed* became a classic Jewish text, recorded in 1166, "I left Jerusalem for Hebron to kiss the graves of my forefathers in the Cave of Machpelah. And on that very day I stood in the Cave and I prayed, praised be God for everything." So memorable was Maimonides' visit that he decided to commemorate the date annually with "a special holiday in which I will rejoice with prayer, food and drink."

When Maimonides died in Egypt, according to legend, his body was taken to the land of Israel for burial. Attacked by a band of robbers on their way to the cemetery, his mourners fled for their lives, leaving the coffin behind. But when even thirty thieves could not lift it, they realized that it must contain the remains of a holy man, and they gave the Jews permission to remove it for burial. Although Maimonides was buried in Tiberias, some of his devoted disciples insisted that he was honored by burial with the patriarchs in Hebron.

One of the most expansive medieval Jewish accounts of Machpelah came from the famed Rabbi Benjamin of Tudela. An inveterate traveler, he avidly documented the existence of Jewish communities wherever he journeyed. In 1171, a mixture of commerce and piety took him to Palestine, where he carefully recorded the Jewish population in the cities he visited: 300 in Ramleh; 200 each in Caesarea, Ashkelon, and Jerusalem; two in Bethlehem; and one each in Lod and Jaffa. Like Maimonides, he found no Jews in Hebron, although not long afterward other visitors mentioned encounters with a solitary Jewish resident and his son.

Inside the Machpelah enclosure, according to Rabbi Benjamin, Gentiles had erected six sepulchers that they “pretend” marked the burial sites of the patriarchs and matriarchs. But pilgrims were misinformed about their true location, “and money is extorted from them.” For “a special reward” to the “Ishmaelite watchman,” a Jew could enter through the “gate of iron, which was constructed by our forefathers, and then he is able to descend below by means of steps, holding a lighted candle in his hand.” Passing through two empty caves, the rabbi approached the sepulchers of the patriarchs and matriarchs. Identified by engraved Hebrew inscriptions, one of them read, “This is the tomb of Abraham our father. Upon him be peace.” Rabbi Benjamin found “many casks filled with the bones of Israelites, as the members of the house of Israel were wont to bring the bones of their fathers thither and deposit them there to this day.”

Another European traveler, Rabbi Petachia of Regensburg, visited Machpelah soon afterward and described how “the watchman led me down the stairs, with candles lit. In the middle of the cave is an opening in the ground. From the opening came a strong wind, which extinguished the candles. That is the burial place of our forefathers, and I prayed there.” According to some, a strong wind blew across the ancestral graves three times daily, and the patriarchs and matriarchs awakened to plead for mercy for their descendants. Almost a century later, the eminent rabbinical scholar Moses Nahmanides wrote to his son that he was traveling to “the city of the graves of our forefathers, to prostrate myself before them and to dig a grave for me there.” Like his predecessors, Nahmanides made no mention of Jewish residents in Hebron almost a century after the Crusader conquest.

Beginning around 1260, with the restoration of Muslim rule by Saladin and his Mameluk soldiers, a small Jewish community, comprising perhaps twenty families, may have reestablished itself in Hebron. But in 1267, an edict prohibited non-Muslims from entering the Machpelah enclosure. Jews were forbidden to ascend any higher than the seventh step outside the southeastern wall, where they were permitted to squeeze messages through a space between the stones. That prohibition would remain in place for exactly 700 years.

According to Sir John Maundeville, a Christian traveler, the Mameluks (who were slave converts to Islam) “hold Christians and Jews as dogs, and say that they should not enter so holy a place.” Another visitor described “a fissure, almost on ground level, through which the Christians and the Jews are permitted to pass their heads while crawling to kiss the holy paving stones.” He watched “poor Israelite pilgrims . . . prostrated, stretching their necks like burrowed fox in order to try to press their lips against their ancestor’s tomb,” while Arab children gathered nearby to mock them. But a letter written in 1290 suggests that a measure of Jewish

communal stability had been restored in Hebron and the wish of pious Jews to be buried in the cemetery near their revered ancestors could once again be fulfilled.

Stories recount persistent subterranean explorations by devout, brave, or foolhardy adventurers who attempted to locate and identify the hallowed graves. Many of these accounts reveal the dangerous allure of the caves, where over the centuries a sacred place had become forbidden space. It was commonly believed that the living ventured into the preserve of the dead at their own considerable risk of defilement and contamination, even death.

Nonetheless, the impulse to explore the burial caves remained strong. In 1119, the monk Arnoul discovered a deep hole beneath the flagstone floor of the Machpelah enclosure. He was lowered by rope into a cave, at the end of which he found a long, narrow corridor that took four days to clear of rocks and debris. Arnoul and his helpers finally removed a large stone that concealed the entrance to a grotto, the presumed patriarchal burial place. Loudly singing "*Kyrie Eleison*," Arnoul entered the chamber. According to one account, he found nothing there. According to another, he uncovered the bones of the patriarchs, which he cleaned with wine and water before carefully setting them on a bier. A decade later, a Muslim explorer was reported to have discovered "a platform on which lay extended the body of Abraham—peace be on him!—clothed in green garments, and the wind as it blew tossed about his white beard."

Occasional Jewish visitors had their own tales to tell. Rabbi Petachia described the Machpelah edifice as "a large palace, which Abraham, our father, built." He gave the keeper of the key to the cave a gold piece to take him to the graves. Inside, he saw "three cells." Another gold piece enabled him to pass through a doorway and descend to "a very spacious cave" with an entrance in the ground. An opening to "the hollow of that rock" was protected by "very thick iron bars, the likes of which no man can make by earthly means but with heavenly help only." A strong "storm-wind" blew out from between the bars, preventing the rabbi from entering. Realizing that the patriarchs were entombed there, he prayed. But "whenever he bent towards the mouth of the cave a storm-wind went forth and cast him backwards."

Rabbi Samuel ben Samson, less venturesome or perhaps less affluent, described his night descent on "a narrow stairway" with twenty-four steps. "We saw there the site of the sacred place (an ancient Synagogue). . . . It is close to the cave. We prostrated ourselves and prayed for mercy." Another twelfth-century Jewish pilgrim recounted, "I, Jacob, the son of R. Nathaniel haCohen, journeyed with much difficulty, but God helped me to enter the Holy Land, and I saw the graves of our righteous patriarchs in Hebron." In disguise, he followed Christians on a steep descent to six graves that

were identified as belonging to the patriarchs and matriarchs. He knew, however, that “it is a falsehood” because the actual graves were separated from Machpelah by “a great wall strengthened with mortar and pottery.” Although monks had once made a small window in the wall, “a strong wind came and killed them all and they closed the window.”

The consequences of such intrepid curiosity could be dire. Once, according to legend, four men were sent by a local ruler to explore the cave, but three died almost immediately on entry. The solitary survivor, asked on his ascent to recount what they had seen, reported, “Our father Abraham in his coffin.” A strong light, “like the light of the sun,” was shining in the cave, “and . . . there was a pleasant odour like that of incense.” But as they passed by the tomb of Rebekah, “the man’s image on Isaac’s tomb called out to us in a great voice, and we remained breathless until we left the cave.” He told how his companions had then suddenly and inexplicably died; indeed, as he completed his story, he, too, expired. Another venturesome explorer, it was reported, suddenly encountered a woman—presumably the biblical matriarch Sarah—combing her hair. She threw her comb at the intruder and hit him in the eyes, blinding him for life.

During a prolonged drought, it was recorded that Jews residing in Palestine were commanded to pray for rain. In return, they requested permission to visit Machpelah to entreat their patriarchs. Ten God-fearing sages were chosen for the pilgrimage. After intense prayer, they entered the cave. The sky instantly clouded over and rain began to fall. But when they began to pray for the redemption of the Jews, a sudden violent gust of wind from the cave, accompanied by a terrible noise, drove them out. Their experience taught Jews not to try to hasten the end of days.

In *Memekor Yisrael*, a collection of classical Jewish folktales, “The Purse of Money” recounts that a cruel Pasha who ruled Hebron imposed a diabolically oppressive tax on the Jewish residents, for which he would accept payment only with identical coins minted in the same year. The penalty for nonpayment would be the death of community leaders and sale of the others into slavery. Jews fasted, lamented, and prayed with all their strength. They even wrote out their appeal to God on clean parchment, ordinarily reserved for Torah scrolls. Bribing a guard, they slipped it through a grated opening in Machpelah. Prostrating themselves, they cried out their entreaties.

That night, in a dream, Abraham revealed the location of the exact sum of money they needed. (In a slightly different version, the Pasha was awakened in the middle of the night by three old men—the patriarchs, evidently—who demanded his money under penalty of death.) Receiving payment the next day, the Pasha was so astonished that he promised to protect Jews thereafter because “the guardian of Israel does not sleep.”

The story concludes, "And the Jews in turn saw that the merits of their forefathers were protecting them."

Interspersed among the myths and stories about the Machpelah cave were scattered glimpses of renewed Jewish life in medieval Hebron. Venetian Jews introduced ornamental glass manufacture at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Isaac ben Joseph ibn Chelo, who moved his family from Spain to Jerusalem in 1333, noted that Hebron Jews, who were "very devout," did "a considerable trade in cotton, which they spin and dye themselves, as well as in all sorts of glass-ware made by them in Hebron." Obadiah of Bertinoro emigrated from Italy to Palestine in 1487 and lived in Hebron for several months. Finding perhaps twenty Jewish families, "all of them scholars," he described Hebron Jews "as few and good and not bad like the men of Jerusalem." They lived in "a closed courtyard, and no Ishmaelite or unclean man comes among them, and it is a tradition in all the country that it is better to be buried in Hebron than Jerusalem." At the Machpelah enclosure, where there was "a large building of the Ishmaelites," he noticed "a small window in the outer wall . . . above the grave of Abraham, and there the Jews are allowed to pray."

Over the centuries, the enclosure had been modified to reflect the triumphalist tastes of successive rulers and the aesthetic preferences of various religious faiths. The caliph Mahdi opened a new entrance through the exterior Herodian wall in 918 after the old one was obstructed by a structure erroneously named by Muslims the "Tomb of Joseph." The Crusader church, built in the late twelfth century, had been refashioned by 1320 as the Djaouliyah mosque. Its elegant interior marble paneling, to a height of six feet, dates from 1331, when the cenotaphs were enclosed. An exquisite *minbar* (pulpit) of carved wood, made in 1091 for a mosque in Ascalon, was donated by the conqueror Saladin and placed in the Isaac and Rebekah hall (where, like the marble paneling, it can still be admired). Saladin also commanded the construction of tall minarets on the eastern and western corners of the enclosure. Only Jews, whose holy site Machpelah had been long before the world knew of Christians or Crusaders, Muslims or Mameluks, were denied the opportunity to modify it to conform to their wishes.

The Jewish community remained so small that often it could barely summon a *minyán* (quorum) for prayer, even for the Kol Nidre service that marked the beginning of Yom Kippur, when "Jews in their talitot walked barefoot to synagogue, and the sun turned to the moon." One year, a futile search for the necessary tenth worshipper left the elders in despair, unable to hold a service on the evening of their holiest day. Just as the sun was setting, according to a popular story, an old man appeared, white bearded, with torn and faded garments and swollen feet, burdened with a heavy sack on his shoulders. Because Hebron Jews were known

to be "God-fearing and wholehearted scholars and sages, holy and pious, dispensing charity and showing hospitality with full devotion," they welcomed him, and he prayed with them.

After the Ne'ilah service that concluded the holy day, while on their way to share the communal break fast, the visitor suddenly vanished. The grateful Jews of Hebron searched for him in vain throughout the night. When the exhausted beadle (synagogue attendant) finally closed his eyes in sleep, he suddenly saw the wayfarer standing before him, garbed in dazzling jewels, his face radiant. He identified himself as "Abraham the Hebrew, your father, whose body rests in the cave of Machpelah. I saw how grieved you were because you did not have the quorum of ten to pray, and that was why I came to you." He assured Hebron Jews "a year of blessing and prosperity beyond all bounds." To honor their righteous visitor, they named their new synagogue Avraham Avinu ("Our father Abraham").

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Jewish life in Hebron was profoundly transformed by the virtually simultaneous impact of the Ottoman conquest and traumatic expulsions from Spain. The inception of Ottoman rule in 1517 unleashed a wave of violence and plunder throughout Palestine. Led by Murad Bey from Jerusalem, the sultan's men, according to the account of a Jew from Corfu, "came to Hebron and killed a great number of Jews, who tried to defend themselves, and he took all their property as booty, until they were left with no refuge or livelihood in the land." Terrified survivors fled to Beirut.

But in 1540, a group of Jewish exiles from Spain, joined by Menahem ben Moshe Bavli, a respected author from Baghdad, acquired a tract of land in Hebron from the local Karaite community, a splinter sect of Jews who rejected Talmudic interpretation of the biblical text. Rabbi Malchiel Ashkenazi, their benefactor, purchased a courtyard that became known as El Cortiyo, "the Court of the Jews." He also subsidized the purchase of additional buildings around the newly built synagogue, where he became the first rabbi of Hebron's restored community. Referred to as an "accomplished scholar, pietist, and saint," he encouraged the migration of scholars of Kabbalistic mysticism from Safed, where he had studied before arriving in Hebron.

By the end of the sixteenth century, additional newcomers from Safed, students of the renowned Rabbi Isaac Luria, enhanced Hebron's reputation as a growing center of Jewish mysticism. Among them was Rabbi Joseph de la Reina, described as "a certain pious man" and "an outstanding scholar in Torah" who "immersed himself in profound study of the true wisdom, which is the wisdom of the Kabbalah." He was said to have fasted every day and spent much of his time studying in isolation. At night, "he would lie on the ground and cover himself with ashes and

weep and lament greatly for the destruction of the Temple." Elijah de Vidas, author of *Reshit Hokhma*, a study of Jewish morals based on extensive material in the *Zohar*, the major text of Jewish mysticism, also arrived in Hebron from Safed. They were joined by handfuls of Jews from Kurdistan and Jerusalem.

Despite these signs of demographic revival, learning, and spiritual renewal, under Ottoman rule Jews remained vulnerable. A story was told of the sultan who was peering through a small opening in the floor of the Isaac hall in Machpelah when he accidentally dropped his sword into the most sacred spot in the shrine, the passage leading directly to the burial caves. Several of the sultan's soldiers were lowered through the opening to retrieve it, but each, in turn, emitted a piercing scream and was pulled up dead. Local Arabs suggested that a Jew, whose life was expendable, be commanded to retrieve the sultan's sword. In terror, the Jewish community fasted and prayed for guidance. The elderly Rabbi Avraham Azulai finally volunteered. Dressed in traditional white burial garments in anticipation of his likely fate, he was lowered into the cave. There he encountered three bearded men who identified themselves as the patriarchs. Fearful of the sultan's wrath, Rabbi Azulai asked permission to remain with them, but they insisted that he return the sultan's sword lest the entire Jewish community be eradicated. He was assured, however, that within a week he would return to join his ancestors. Rabbi Azulai spent his final week of life teaching Torah to his students. When he died, he was buried in the Jewish cemetery near the Cave of Machpelah.

The story of Rabbi Azulai revealed the vulnerability of Hebron Jews, a predominantly Sephardic community that depended, as Jews in Hebron and elsewhere had done for centuries, on the mercy of local rulers for survival. Jews lived in a warren of cramped stone houses separated by narrow alleys, still too impoverished even to send emissaries abroad to appeal for funds, a common practice among Jewish communities in Palestine. The best they could hope for in Hebron was a life of piety, with burial near the patriarchal tombs as their cherished reward. They could only pray that in the next world, if not in this one, their righteousness would be rewarded.

But Hebron Jews shared occasional moments of hope. In 1659, Rabbi Abraham Pereira, an Amsterdam philanthropist, established the Hesed l'Avraham yeshiva, which attracted distinguished rabbis and students. Four years later, Shabbetai Zevi, the infamous self-proclaimed messiah who attracted an ecstatic following among Jews in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, visited Hebron. He was said to have recited afternoon prayers in the synagogue and evening prayers at Machpelah. He achieved enduring notoriety soon afterward when he was arrested by the sultan and offered the choice between conversion and death. His decision

to become a Muslim provoked a serious crisis of faith among his devoted Jewish followers.

Reverberations from Shabbetai Zevi's betrayal lingered in Hebron for many years. They did not entirely dissipate until Rabbi Abraham Gershon of Kutow, brother-in-law of the Ba'al Shem Tov, founder of the dynamic movement of Jewish spiritual revival known as Hasidism, arrived in Hebron in 1746. He described the community in a letter to his revered brother-in-law: "In this holy city there is a courtyard of the Jews. On Sabbaths and holidays they close it, nobody goes out and nobody comes in, and all night they close it and people are almost not afraid." He noted that Jews arose shortly after midnight to recite evening prayers and to study in the yeshiva. "They drink water from the wells of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who dug themselves good and healthy water."

With attentive precision, Rabbi Gershon described Hebron Jews as "almost not afraid" yet fated to be without security within the walls and gates of their tiny enclosure. They faithfully roused themselves for study and prayer, the pillars of Jewish communal survival ever since the destruction of the Temple. But danger always lurked beyond the ghetto gates, a grim reality that may help explain the appeal to Hebron Jews of such ecstatic redemptive movements as Safed mysticism, Shabbetai Zevi's messianism, and Hasidic enthusiasm.

Hebron, like other Jewish communities in Palestine under Ottoman rule, endured debilitating poverty. A mounting debt, extortion by local Arab tribal leaders, and quarrels over the distribution of overseas donations led to the establishment in 1733 of a Committee of Officials for Hebron in Istanbul to collect and transfer funds, advance credit, intercede with rulers, and provide financial assistance. Requiring each Jew in Istanbul to give one para weekly "for the redemption of the holy city of Hebron," it sent a fixed donation annually to the Hebron community, where "Gentiles are threatening and raising their voices" for repayment of debts.

But the financial situation remained grim. In desperation, Hebron Jews issued a sorrowful appeal to diaspora communities in 1744: "We were delivered to cruel gentiles . . . and the creditor comes to collect his debt . . . and we do not have [money] . . . and he raises his hand against [Jews] with whips, and beats and wounds. . . . Our enemies have said, 'Let us destroy that people.'" But when Hebron emissary Rabbi Isaac Zedaka traveled to Europe to appeal for funds, he returned empty-handed.

Comprising perhaps 100 residents, the community struggled to survive. "There was no busy social and spiritual life," historian Jacob Barnai has concluded, "and in most areas of life torpor reigned." Although there were two yeshivas in Hebron, both established in the seventeenth century, they seem to have become more a source of income for Torah scholars than centers of spiritual vitality. Relations with their Muslim neighbors

were uneasy; at mid-century, Muslim officials entreated Istanbul authorities, "Let us replace the Jews by another nation so that the name of Israel will no longer be remembered in the hills of Hebron."

The Hebron community was enlarged and strengthened during the eighteenth century by an influx of Chabad Hasidim. Rabbi Abraham Gerson, brother-in-law of the Baal Shem Tov, founder of Hasidism in Eastern Europe, arrived from Poland in 1747. Settling briefly in Hebron before leaving for Jerusalem, he found an enthusiastic community: "when there is a feast of circumcision or other festivity all the important people come and everyone is happy and moreover the important people among the gentiles like the Jews very much." But Rabbi Haim Abulafia, who was born in Hebron, grew up in Jerusalem, and became a rabbi in Safed, found "satisfaction and quiet and security" only in Tiberias. "All the residents of the above-mentioned places," he wrote in 1742, "are very bitter and bothered most of the time by troubles and difficulties."

The Hebron community was further enlarged by the arrival of Hasidic followers of Rabbi Dov Baer (known as the Mittler Rebbe), disciple and successor to the Baal Shem Tov. Rabbi Mordecai Rubio came from Jerusalem, served as head of two local yeshivas, and was appointed chief rabbi of Hebron in 1774. Rabbi Hayyim Joseph David Azulai, descended from a family of prominent Spanish rabbis, moved to Hebron from Jerusalem in 1769 and spent much of his time as an emissary abroad, fund-raising for the beleaguered community. By the end of the century, despite communal travails and financial uncertainties, Hebron had emerged as a significant center of rabbinical scholarship. Rabbi Avraham Zeevi's *Orim Gedolim* (Great Lights), published in 1758, and Rabbi Rubio's *Shemen haMor* (The Essence of Oil), published in 1793, brought intellectual distinction to the community.

But economic privation left Hebron Jews vulnerable. Like the holy cities of Safed and Tiberias, Hebron remained financially dependent on the Committee of Officials in Istanbul. Occasionally, sparse evidence suggests, agents were dispatched from Jerusalem to manage its finances. Near the end of the century, Jerusalem Chief Rabbi Yom-Tov Algazi wrote that for nearly a decade the Hebron community "had been under siege and in trouble because of the large number of poor people in one place, and since that time . . . the Jerusalem community supervises the Hebron community, to help them pay their debts to the Gentiles and to other Jews, [and] to support them." Burdened by debt, the chief rabbi continued, Hebronites "appealed to me that I should have mercy on them and appoint supervisors and officials over them from the people of Jerusalem because they have been faithful and for the sake of the love of our forefathers."

Beginning in 1650 and for the next two centuries, some 130 Hebron rabbis traveled abroad as representatives of the community to seek financial

support. The itinerary of the well-traveled Rabbi Azulai included visits to Alexandria, Florence, Venice, Innsbruck, Frankfurt, Amsterdam, London, Paris, Sicily, Istanbul, Cyprus, and Beirut—with stops along the way in such now-forgotten Jewish outposts as Bir El Abd, Guastalla, Pfersee, Greussenheim, Aschaffenburg, Xanten, Carmagnola, Civitavecchia, Kara-Burun, and Boghaz-Hissar. His travels provide a virtual atlas of Jewish settlement in North Africa, Europe, and the Middle East at the end of the eighteenth century.

Among the more successful—and engaging—Hebron emissaries was Rabbi Raphael Haim Isaac Carigal, who traveled in the Near East and Europe to solicit donations before arriving in Curaçao, the oldest Jewish community in the Western Hemisphere, in 1762. There he taught for two years, earning 750 pesos annually while raising funds for the Hebron community. Returning to Hebron to rejoin his family, he remained there for several years before leaving once again for Europe and the Caribbean. In 1772, he arrived in Philadelphia but soon moved to New York and then to Rhode Island.

There Rabbi Carigal presided over a Purim service attended by Ezra Stiles, pastor of the Second Congregational Church in Newport and subsequently president of Yale University. Stiles was greatly impressed, especially by the rabbi's vestments: "dressed in a red garment with the usual Phylacteries and habilments, the white silk Surplice [*talit*]; he wore a high fur cap, had a long beard. He has the appearance of an ingenious and sensible man." Some weeks later, Stiles returned to the synagogue for Passover services, when Rabbi Carigal again attracted his attention for wearing "a high Fur Cap, exactly like a Womans Muff." Word of Rabbi Carigal's eloquence (and sartorial splendor) evidently spread through Rhode Island. When he led Shavuot services at the Touro synagogue in Newport, the governor and two members of the state judiciary were in attendance.

Rabbi Carigal and Pastor Stiles struck up an incongruous but mutually rewarding friendship. Studying Hebrew and Kabbalistic mysticism together, they speculated about the language in which Moses wrote the Ten Commandments and when the Messiah might arrive. In a gesture of reciprocity, Rabbi Carigal attended services in Pastor Stiles's church, and after he left Newport, they maintained a lengthy correspondence in Hebrew. When Stiles, who had become a Hebraic scholar of some repute under Rabbi Carigal's mentoring, was appointed president of Yale, Hebrew was introduced as a required course for entering students. Rabbi Carigal left the United States to become a congregational rabbi in Barbados, where he died in 1777 while awaiting the arrival of his family from Hebron.

Despite the diligent efforts of its overseas emissaries, Hebron remained an isolated and impoverished enclave of Jewish piety. Its primary commercial activities—textile dyeing, silk weaving, and leather crafts—could not sustain the community economically. When the son of a local sheikh mysteriously disappeared in 1773, Hebron Jews were slandered by a blood libel that falsely accused them of murdering him. Punished with an exorbitant fine, the community teetered on the edge of dissolution.

The tiny cramped ghetto, at the edge of the vegetable market, displayed the precarious vulnerability of its residents. Two dark and narrow streets, each less than six feet wide, separated the Jewish quarter from the surrounding Muslim city. Three gates opened from the ghetto to the hostile world outside: the “market gate,” where blessings were offered for miracles; the “new gate,” in a dark and dingy location where evil spirits were said to reside; and the “bathing gate,” where brides were celebrated as they passed through. Each night, the gates were securely locked.

Its stone buildings were so tightly squeezed together, separated only by narrow alleys, that a marauder could easily attack and escape by jumping from roof to roof. When a new family arrived, another dwelling would be added to an existing rooftop; in time, the vertical expansions created four- or five-story extensions of the original structure. “Happy is he whose home is among the upper ones,” it was written, “for he enjoys the sunlight and fresh air, and woe [to him] whose home is among the lower ones, who has never seen a ray of light in his life.”

The physical and spiritual center of the neighborhood was the Avraham Avinu synagogue, recognized as one of the most beautiful in Palestine. It was the recipient of generous gifts from all over the Jewish world: Torah scrolls and crowns, oil lamps, and a lavishly embroidered *parochet* (curtain) for the ark. It remained the central place of Jewish worship in Hebron until 1929. With the generosity of donors, there were three yeshivas in Hebron by the end of the eighteenth century, more than the combined total for Safed and Tiberias (although Jerusalem had twenty-four).

Throughout the eighteenth century, there was a noticeable increase in the frequency of Jewish visitors to—and travelers from—Hebron. Moses Casuto, arriving in March 1734 with his young son, first viewed Hebron from a nearby hill where they “sat on the ground and rent their garments according to the local custom, as is required of Jews.” He took lodging at the Hospice of the Foreigners, on the edge of town, which housed travelers for three days “in the manner of Abraham.” Fed in a Jewish home, he received “the customary gifts of mutton, wine and brandy” from the community. Cassuto estimated that Hebron Jews inhabited forty houses within the ghetto. “They apply themselves to studies and a life of devotion,” he observed, supported with funds solicited overseas by their roving “ambassadors.”

Cassuto discovered a willing and childless rabbi “of good position,” living with his wife and mother, who agreed to teach his son. He noted, “They were all delighted to have the little boy in their house and to treat him as their own child and to train him in his studies.” This suited Cassuto, who preferred Hebron to Jerusalem “since it was more peaceful and withdrawn.” Paying the rabbi for a year of teaching, he left his son behind in Hebron and resumed his journey.

Simon van Geldern was less impressed with Hebron. Dismayed by the looting and confiscation of Jewish property in Jerusalem, he fled south by camel in 1766. In Hebron, he found temporary accommodation among the families (twenty or thirty by his count) who lived in the ghetto. But he soon discovered that it was “very expensive,” and “it is hard to earn enough to make a living” among impoverished Jews who were deeply in debt.

Aside from occasional visitors’ glimpses, the recorded history of Hebron Jewry from the destruction of the Second Temple until the end of the eighteenth century remained intermittent and sparse. This reflects grim historical reality: only handfuls of Jews returned sporadically, if persistently, to Hebron, where they struggled to sustain a viable community. Except for some enduring legends, scattered publications of rabbinical scholars, and infrequent travelers’ accounts, Jews in Hebron left little documentation of their arduous existence.

But generations of Hebron Jews never relinquished their fierce attachment to the City of the Patriarchs. The Machpelah holy site, inaccessible though it was after the middle of the thirteenth century, encapsulated their oldest and deepest historical memories of God’s promise of the land to Abraham for his progeny. Not expecting its fulfillment during their lifetimes, they lived in Hebron to die there and be buried near the tombs of their biblical ancestors. With only their faith and piety to sustain them during centuries of oppression and deprivation, they endured.

At the end of the eighteenth century, barely 6,000 Jews lived in all of Palestine, nearly half of whom resided in Jerusalem. The other ancient holy cities—Hebron, Safed, and Tiberias—numbered, at most, several hundred Jews each. Life was not easy. The plague and other infectious diseases could quickly decimate a community. The elderly, who were a relatively large proportion of the population, and the newborn, whose mortality rates were high, were especially vulnerable. Economic hardship, local rebellions, and wars kept the numbers low. Dependent on diaspora Jews and Istanbul officials for financial sustenance, the Hebron community could not escape what historian Barnai calls “the stagnation of social and spiritual life” that beset all of Palestinian Jewry during the eighteenth century.

Eighteen centuries after King Herod launched his bold construction plan for Roman Palestine, little but abandoned ruins remained at Masada, Herodian, and Caesaria, while only the Western Wall had survived the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. But the intact Machpelah enclosure, Herod's most enduring architectural monument in the Land of Israel, still loomed over the city of Hebron. If only in small numbers, Jews were still drawn to the "holy territory of Abraham" by the tenacious strength of ancestral bonds.

3



Community

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, writes historian Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, Palestine languished as “a derelict province of the decaying Ottoman Empire.” With a primitive economy, rampant poverty, and frequent local uprisings, its “small and miserable” towns—from Jaffa to Jerusalem and from Safed to Hebron—were isolated pockets of neglect, disease, and decay. Yet by mid-century, Palestine had entered its “Age of Rediscovery,” becoming a magnet for pilgrims, tourists, surveyors, archaeologists, artists, and photographers. Before the century closed, the first Zionist settlers had arrived, and Palestine moved into the orbit of European and American interests, where it has remained ever since.

Hebron was an isolated town with fewer than 6,000 people. An intrepid visitor, venturing into the teeming Arab *souk*, where everything from Turkish slippers to skinned lamb was available (with its price negotiable), might finally stumble on the barely visible door that opened to the Jewish Quarter. Stepping inside, he would find “a mountain of houses . . . a small, insignificant, gloomy mountain without a square centimeter of soil,” squeezed so tightly together that narrow stairs and rickety roofs were pressed into service as public passages. So jumbled and cramped were the buildings that while searching for access to public space, the visitor might even wander accidentally into a bedroom. “The sun,” he sadly concluded, “has nothing more incredible to heat on all the surface of the earth!” Jews came to Hebron, it seemed, only “to pray and die.”

But the Jewish community, by then comprising perhaps fifty families, was nothing if not resilient. During the next half century, for reasons both internal and external—ranging from the generosity of benefactors

to the growing popularity of transoceanic tourism and an influx of new residents—the still predominantly Sephardic Jewish community began to emerge from the shadows of obscurity. It was enlarged by the arrival of a community of Ashkenazi Jews, mostly Lubavitcher Hasidim from Eastern Europe. By the end of the century, with new buildings, yeshivas, and an expanding population, the Hebron Jewish Quarter had reached the cusp of unprecedented growth and development, both material and spiritual.

The city had long been a flourishing market center where local Bedouin from the south bought and sold sheep and goats and marketed the cheese and wool that their animals produced. The processing of hides—for water bags, shoes, carpets, and garments—was a major manufacturing activity. Some Jews entered the silk-weaving and glassmaking trades; there were more than two dozen kilns, employing 150 workers who manufactured glass for lamps, jewelry, and beads. Other Hebronites processed grapes and raisins into wine. A steady trickle of visitors arrived as pilgrims, but onerous travel conditions between Jerusalem and Hebron—there was no paved road between the cities until near the end of the century—limited their numbers.

Jewish revival accompanied spatial expansion. According to an 1807 deed, a small parcel of land, comprising a vegetable market, was sold to “Chaim the Egyptian Jew who was head of the Jewish community.” Four years later, a far more substantial tract of nearly 800 *dunams* was purchased for the community. Some Jews from Gaza relocated to Hebron in 1811, bringing with them a unique fifteenth-century synagogue door, inlaid with seashells. The arrival of fifteen Ashkenazi families, Chabad Hasidim from Safed, followed by scattered handfuls of immigrants from central Europe, significantly enlarged the population to approximately 500 by 1817. By the 1830s, it was estimated that 700 Jews lived in Hebron among 5,000 Arabs.

But Hebron Jews remained exceedingly vulnerable to the volatility of their Muslim neighbors and the whims of absentee rulers from Constantinople. Bedouin tribes, engaged in centuries-old rivalries, raided and plundered Hebron at their pleasure while extracting a *ghafar*, or road tax, from travelers passing through to Gaza and Egypt. Hebron Muslims were well known and duly feared for their zealous protection of their mosque and its sacred tombs from the intrusions of prying visitors. Arabs from Hebron and Bethlehem fought occasional but always fierce and bloody internecine battles. The Ottoman army, which confined most of its meager and inept regiments to Jerusalem, provided little protection to anyone.

During the 1830s, catastrophe was interwoven with opportunity. Hebron Arabs revolted against Turkish rule in 1834. Ibrahim Pasha, arriving from Egypt amid the turmoil, quashed their rebellion. He “carried

the place by storm, and gave it over to sack and pillage. . . . The Jews especially are reported to have suffered the most cruel outrages from the brutal soldiery." Indifferent to murder and plunder, Ibrahim Pasha was nonetheless tolerant of religious minorities. Jews were encouraged to repair their old synagogues and build new ones. But in 1837, Hebron was severely damaged by an earthquake. When Turkish rule was restored three years later, much of the town was still in ruins.

Despite the local turmoil, Christian visitors began to arrive in Palestine in increasing numbers, leaving vivid impressions—in words and pictures—of their encounters. With steamship voyages becoming shorter and less risky, the Holy Land began to attract religious believers from Europe and America, yearning for glimpses (real or imagined) of the biblical past, and tourists seeking exotic adventure. As bleak as nineteenth-century Palestine seems to have been (Mark Twain famously described it as "desolate and unlovely"), pilgrims and travelers, Bible scholars, artists, and foreign dignitaries included Hebron in their Palestinian itineraries.

The turning point came in 1838, when an uncommonly knowledgeable American visitor, Edward Robinson, transformed his own personal explorations of belief and faith into a pioneering study of the archaeology and geography of the Holy Land. The son of a Congregationalist minister, Robinson grew up in Connecticut, where, "as in the case of most of my country men, especially in New England, the scenes of the Bible had made a deep impression upon my mind." As a student at the Andover Theological Seminary in Boston, he deepened his belief in the unerring historical veracity of the Bible and parlayed his appointment at the Union Theological Seminary in New York into released time for research in Palestine. His massive three-volume *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petraea*, a pioneering work of scholarship, became the foundation of Palestine biblical exploration.

Approaching Hebron at the end of May, Robinson wrote, "We had now reached a most interesting point in our journey." He was prepared to encounter "one of the most ancient still existing cities mentioned in the Scriptures, or perhaps in the records of the world." In Hebron, on his way to Machpelah, he observed houses "all of stone, high and well built, with windows and flat roofs; and on these roofs small domes, sometimes two or three to each house."

The Machpelah enclosure, he wrote, surely was the "most remarkable object in Hebron, and one of the most so in all of Palestine." Carefully measuring its dimensions, Robinson astutely noted the similarities of the stones to those of the Western Wall. He was confident that "the remarkable external structure of the Haram is indeed the work of Jewish hands, erected long before the destruction of the nation, around the sepulcher of

their revered progenitors." Our minds, he acknowledged, "were deeply affected by all these associations."

Robinson, like visitors ever since Caleb and the spies, admired "the abundance and large size of the raisins . . . [and] the excellence and cheapness of the fruit." In the "rich fields and vineyards" outside the town, he saw figs, pomegranates, apricots, and quince. "The grapes are the finest in Palestine"; Jews make wine from the grapes, and "the wine is good." Robinson visited the local glass shops "for which Hebron has long been celebrated," where rings of colored glass worn as jewelry by Arab women and attractive small lamps were manufactured. Jewish women in Hebron, he recorded, appeared "neat and prepossessing" and "greeted us kindly." They were all dressed alike: "a long piece of white stuff like a veil or shawl thrown over the head, drawn together under the chin, and hanging down to the feet." He spoke German to women who were "reading prayers and wailing" at a small hole in the enclosure wall of Machpelah, "but they were all from Spain, and we could hold no communication."

In the Jewish Quarter, Robinson called on the "chief Rabbi of the Jews." Received at the door by a "Spanish" Jew, he was ushered through "a long series of passages, into a small but very neat room, with a divan around the walls, and the windows looking out upon the western hills." He was impressed by its cleanliness, "far neater than anything I had yet seen of eastern life." The "old rabbi" from Venice, "blind of one eye and having a long white beard," soon entered. Sherbet and coffee were served, but Robinson declined breakfast. If any words were spoken between them, they went unrecorded.

A visit to a synagogue—which from Robinson's description also functioned as a yeshiva—was arranged. In "a poor, but neat room," used as a school for half a dozen boys, Robinson noticed several Torah scrolls, some "in cases covered over with silver or embroidery," said to be gifts from wealthy European Jews. According to his Hebron host, the local population consisted of 1,500 taxable Muslims, forty-one taxable Jews, and 200 other Jews with "European protection" who retained their foreign citizenship. Leaving Hebron, Robinson visited "Abraham's Oak" in nearby Mamre. "We hardly saw another like it in all Palestine," with the trunk separated "almost immediately into three large boughs or trunks; and one of these again, higher up, into two." He was "highly gratified" by his Hebron visit, even if signs of neatness and cleanliness seem to have left the strongest impression.

During the same year, British traveler and writer William Thomson also visited Hebron, recording his "intense desire to penetrate the hidden recesses of Machpelah which the fanatical custodians of the Haram so jealously conceal." He, too, noticed the striking resemblance between the beveled stones of the Machpelah enclosure and the Western Wall in

Jerusalem—"very ancient," he concluded, and "probably of Jewish workmanship." He observed that Jews could get no closer than a small opening near the northwest corner of the mosque, where "they are obliged to lay flat on the ground" to kiss and touch a piece of sacred rock through a small opening. "Before the introduction of Muhammedan fanaticism," Thomson wrote sharply, "there is no evidence that access to the cave was prohibited." He scorned "the idolatrous reverence for such sites," which "was wholly unknown among pious Hebrews" in antiquity. According to his estimate, 700 Jews lived in Hebron among Muslims "of a most bigoted and insolent character."

What Robinson, Thomson, and other travelers captured in words, artists began to capture in visual imagery. Among the nineteenth-century painters who created a compelling "landscape of belief" from their Holy Land travels, none equaled David Roberts. Born in Scotland and raised on the Bible in a strict Presbyterian family, he had painted house interiors in Edinburgh and then theater sets in London. Traveling to Spain, Roberts found his artistic calling depicting the grandeur of decaying civilizations. His visit to the Near East in 1838–1839, according to his biographer, became "the central episode of his artistic life." Arriving in Egypt, Roberts described the "misgovernment and the barbarism of the Moslem creed" in a letter to his daughter. Following the path of the ancient Israelites through Sinai to Palestine, he arrived dressed as a Bedouin. Approaching Hebron in mid-February, he wrote in his diary with evident excitement,

On turning the side of a hill, the little town of Hebron burst upon us. Its situation is beautiful: and the houses glittering in the noon-day sun had a look of English cleanliness, after the wretched hovels of Egypt. The children who came out to meet us, were among the most beautiful I had ever seen. The countenance was truly Jewish, but with a healthy rosy colour which I have seldom seen out of England.

To his disappointment, Roberts was unable to gain entry to the Machpelah mosque. Had permission been granted, his precise eye, artistic hand, romantic temperament, and familiarity with the biblical text surely would have contributed to a richly textured lithograph like those he did of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. It would have revealed the high-domed arched ceiling; marble columns; lamps of gold, silver, and crystal; intricately woven carpets from Damascus and Baghdad; colored fabrics from Persia and Turkey; marble cenotaphs above the burial cave; and Saladin's elegant *minbar*. Here, too, an artistic shaft of sunlight surely would have illuminated the interior sanctity of the ancient mosque, as it did in Roberts's paintings of the Jerusalem and Bethlehem church interiors.

Instead, Roberts perched on the Tel Rumeida hillside, overlooking Hebron, where he made two colored sketches of the town. His only completed lithograph of Hebron appeared in volume 3 of his magisterial *The Holy Land*, published in 1843. It instantly draws the viewer's eye, as it surely did Roberts's, to the "massive enclosure" of Machpelah, which, he observed, "seems of Jewish building." As in his lithographs of Nablus (biblical Shechem), Jerusalem, and Mount Sinai, the reflected brightness of the "glittering" sun on the Hebron shrine and its twin minarets accentuated its sanctity. Perhaps Roberts was inspired by the prophecy of Isaiah:

Arise, shine, for your light has dawned . . .
Behold! Darkness shall cover the earth,
And thick clouds the peoples;
But upon you the Lord will shine. . . .
(Isa. 60:1–3)

Bathed in pale whiteness, the Machpelah enclosure seems almost ethereal, a special place of divine illumination, even if men on horseback in the middle distance resemble leisurely riders in the English countryside. Roberts's richly hued lithographs became a landmark of Holy Land artistic discovery and documentation—and Orientalist imagination.

For Hebron Jews, however, the most consequential nineteenth-century visitor surely was Sir Moses Montefiore, the renowned philanthropist and generous benefactor of world Jewry. Accompanied by his wife Judith, he arrived in Hebron in June 1838. The Montefiores were met by hundreds of Jews, "many of whom danced and sang psalms to manifest their delight." Presented with seating certificates for the "Portuguese and German" synagogues, they were also invited—surely in anticipation of philanthropic donations—to accept the presidency of various schools and charities.

Lady Montefiore was instantly captivated by Hebron Jews. "The men who dwell here love the land of their forefathers," she wrote in her diary. "This love is in their hearts and their devotion is to . . . their forefathers before their tie to any kings." The responses of Sir Moses were more muted and practical: contributing to local Jewish institutions and distributing "benevolent gifts" to residents on his way to visit Hebron synagogues, he nonetheless encouraged Jews to live by their own productive labor.

Three days after their arrival in Hebron, the Montefiores, followed by a procession of Jews, set out for Machpelah. "On reaching the steps of the Mosque, even before we had dismounted," he wrote, "there was a great cry against us entering." Approaching the entrance, they encountered a crowd of Muslims, "all screaming and threatening us with sticks." A "dervish" blocked the door, inciting the crowd by "shrieking in a most

frightful manner." Not even the governor's intercession enabled them to gain entry.

The generous financial contributions of Sir Moses to the Hebron community were exceeded in historical significance by three censuses that he sponsored at ten-year intervals between 1855 and 1875. Based on signed questionnaires returned to Montefiore in London, they provide a detailed profile that is unmatched for its meticulous documentation of the size and structure of the Hebron Jewish community in the second half of the nineteenth century.

According to the 1855 census, nearly 400 Jews lived in the City of the Patriarchs. Among the 249 Sephardic residents were fifty-seven married couples, four single men, three single women, twenty-six widows (ranging in age from thirty-one to 100), and eighty-nine children under the age of thirteen and twelve in their teens. Of the sixty-one men, more than half (thirty-six) had been born in Hebron. Among other places of origin were Gaza, Jerusalem, Turkey, and Damascus—and such now-forgotten locations as Bozana (Serbia), Aram Zova (Syria), and Escofia (Spain). Nine of the women were born in Hebron, while most of the others came from Jerusalem, Gaza, and Turkey, with a scattering from Germany, Sofia, and Mesopotamia.

The smaller Ashkenazi community of 142 Jews was comprised of thirty-nine families with forty-six children under the age of thirteen and four who were older, five single men, and nine widows. A minority of the men were born in Palestine, in one or another of the four traditional holy cities: seven in Hebron, two in Safed, and one each in Jerusalem and Tiberias. Two came from Minsk and one from Vilna, and the others were scattered primarily among Mahaleve (Hungary), Slonim (Lithuania), Jacobstadt (Latvia), and Zacharzuk (Poland).

Information about the work lives of Ashkenazi men revealed that nearly all the adult males were classified as Torah scholars, while three served as the *shamash* in synagogues, summoning men to prayer, delivering messages, and collecting alms. There was one businessman, one secretary, and one man without identified employment. In both Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities, family size was small, in all likelihood a reflection of severe economic privation, cramped living space, and the absence of medical care in a region where malaria and other infectious diseases exacted a heavy toll.

Yet within ten years, the Jewish community had grown significantly, from 391 to 495 members. By 1865, there was a sharp increase in the number of Ashkenazi families (from thirty-nine to fifty-eight), spurred by the arrival of Rabbi Simon Manahem Haikin from Safed and his loyal following from Lubavitch, the center of Chabad Hasidism in Eastern Europe. Like the other ancient holy cities—Jerusalem, Tiberias, and Safed—Hebron was

beginning to attract Orthodox Ashkenazi Jews who hoped to find in the isolation of Palestine a refuge from the disruptive currents of assimilation and Reform stirred by the Enlightenment and emancipation. Other newcomers came from Chernobyl, Warsaw, and Jassy. According to the new census, all the unmarried adult males in the Ashkenazi community were Chabad students who were economically supported by the generosity of Jews abroad. Families were growing larger: the number of Ashkenazi children under the age of thirteen spurted from forty-six to seventy-nine (while declining from eighty-nine to eighty-four in Sephardic families).

The Sephardic community was led by Rabbi Eliahu Mani. His arrival had encouraged a dozen families from Mesopotamia (probably Baghdad) to follow his lead. It included twenty-three scholars, thirteen civil servants, six businessmen, four moneylenders, two bakers, two peddlers, a tailor, a carpenter, a vegetable vendor, and a butcher. The Avraham Avinu synagogue alone employed a secretary, a beadle, a Torah reader, a prayer reader, a treasurer, a president, and a member of the Bet Din (religious court). In Sephardic families, where a son customarily inherited the job of his father, it was noted that with the aging of Rabbi Zvi Baggio, the butcher, he had nominated his son, Rabbi Chaim, to replace him. Supplementing immigration from Baghdad, new arrivals also came from Sofia and Salonika. Chief Rabbi Yehuda Havilo of Alexandria and Chief Rabbi Yosef Fintsi of Belgrade were among the distinguished newcomers.

The final Montefiore census, compiled in 1875, bore the endorsement of an array of Sephardic rabbis, the communal leaders. At the head of the list was Rabbi Elijah ben Suleman Mani, who had come to Jerusalem from Baghdad in 1856 and, on his move to Hebron two years later, had founded the Beit Yaakov yeshiva. He would serve as Sephardic chief rabbi until his death in 1899. (Rabbi Mani's primary source of financial support, according to an annotation to the census return, was a wealthy benefactor.) The Sephardic community, with Turkey and Mesopotamia as its major sources of immigration, included 433 people, a sharp increase in ten years.

The Ashkenazi community was led by the elderly Rabbi Shimon Men-neseh Chaikin, who had lived in Hebron for half a century after his arrival from Shaklev. A new rabbinical family, headed by Rabbi Lev Slonim and Rabbi Levi Yitzhak Slonim, came from a center of Lithuanian Hasidism that began to send many of its scholars to Palestine, mostly to Jerusalem, after mid-century. The Slonims would serve as leaders of the Ashkenazi community of Hebron for the next half century. With the spurt in Ashkenazi growth, more than doubling to 489 members, the Hebron Jewish population numbered almost 1,000.

The 1875 census documented the continuing economic privation of the community. Among Sephardic Jews, thirty-eight men and twenty-

nine widows were considered “poor,” while many others reported only meager income. Among the impoverished, seven were itinerant peddlers, one inscribed mezuzah parchments, and there was one *batlan* (bum). Of the four communal leaders, one was the head of the Bet Din, and three others served as judges. Among the identified civil servants were four teachers, two cantors, two *shamashes* (who performed various synagogue functions), and a writer. There were nineteen scholars (for whom study defined their work); thirteen “professionals,” including two butchers and two bakers (one for Sephardim, the other for Ashkenazim), two shoemakers, two blacksmiths, two carpenters, two book makers, and a barber; and twenty-four businessmen (twelve moneylenders, three landlords, five store owners, and four peddlers). Seven immigrants from Turkey who supported themselves were identified as workers of God. Two community members were considered very wealthy.

Nearly one-third of the Ashkenazi community was counted among the poor. Among men, study and prayer, supported by Jewish charities locally and abroad, often took priority over economically remunerative employment. Many of the employed men—teachers, synagogue officials, and judges—worked for communal religious institutions. There were thirty scholars and an array of civil servants (five teachers, two scribes, a *mashgiach* who supervised *kashrut*, a *shamash*, a *chazzan* to lead prayer services, and a *gabbai* who assisted the rabbi). Eighteen businessmen were counted, along with two doctors, two merchants, and sixteen young men who studied at the Beit Midrash. Ten men were searching for employment, forty men did not work at all, one sick old man was unable to work, and there was one *sarsoor* (pimp).

The Montefiore census data indicate that the Jewish community of Hebron was, in reality, a bifurcated community of Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews, each with its own history, rituals, language, leadership, and communal services. Demographic changes had rebalanced the Hebron Jewish population at 60 percent Sephardic Jews and 40 percent Chabad Hassidim. Most of the Sephardic Jews spoke Arabic and Spanish, or Ladino, while the Ashkenazim spoke Yiddish, preserving Hebrew as the language of study and prayer. Whether and how effectively they communicated with each other is not known.

Cultural differences between the communities, vividly displayed in their styles of dress (Sephardic Jews were virtually indistinguishable from local Arabs) and forms of synagogue worship, were noticed and recorded. Moses Margoliouth, a mid-century English visitor who had converted to Christianity, sharply described the “fanatical” Hasidim of Hebron, “going through their antics—shouting, screaming, clapping their hands, knocking, and squeaking in the most frantic manner.” He strongly preferred the “solemn unison” that characterized Sephardic prayer.

Despite their limited economic means, Hebron Jews remained known for their generous hospitality in the spirit of Abraham. "They are very charitable people," observed Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Katinetz, "and provide for all the needs of any traveler visiting the city." Reverend D. A. Randall, an American minister who arrived in Hebron with a group of seven tourists, discovered that there was no hotel or public house to accommodate them. Speaking German, they approached a Jew who arranged for a room with a bed and three meals for five dollars. "They were a kind-hearted family, and did the best they could for us," Randall wrote, but "the miserable, filthy cookery, the camp on the floor, and the multitude of fleas" meant that the group "did not pass a delightfully pleasant night." Like many visitors before them, they explored the Arab bazaar, admired the glass jewelry, and appreciated the fresh fruit.

Reverend Randall was awed by the Machpelah enclosure, where "the six ancestors of the Hebrew nation" were enshrined within its "massive" walls. It was little wonder, he wrote, that Jews "should cling to it as they do to the moss-grown stones that mark the foundation of the Holy Temple." But with evident disappointment, he asked, "Would you like to visit this sepulchral abode of the venerable dead? You attempt it at your peril." Wishing that he could "annihilate the intolerance that for near seven hundred years has held dominion there," he wanted "to throw open those iron doors and enter." Longingly, he wondered, "What would I see?" But with their "jealous watchfulness," local Muslims had developed a well-earned reputation for being "restless, hostile, and warlike," so Randall could not see for himself. Seated instead on a hill overlooking the city, gazing at the Machpelah enclosure, his thoughts "wandered back into the dim obscurity of the earliest records of our race."

Other Hebron visitors were similarly tantalized. C. R. Conder and H. H. Kitchener, who came to Hebron during their pioneering survey of Palestine, described privileged visits to Machpelah by the prince of Wales and Frederick III, crown prince of Prussia. Both princes found the entrance to the caves "closed with stone slabs clamped with iron." They saw "a shaft, covered by a stone," with a hole "rather over a foot in diameter." Into it a lamp had been lowered, illuminating a chamber below with a doorway said to lead to the inner caves. But despite letters of permission from the sultan, they could get no closer. The cave, Conder and Kitchener concluded, "has probably not been entered for 700 years at least." To do so, they knew, "would be regarded by the Moslems with extreme repugnance."

Despite their exclusion from Machpelah, religious pilgrims—whose numbers greatly increased during the second half of the century—were drawn to Hebron holy sites. In nearby Mamre, the remnants of Abraham's revered oak tree were acquired in 1871 by the Russian archimandrite of

Jerusalem, which built a monastery with a hospice for visitors. Next to the tree, a tent for pilgrims marked the presumed location of Abraham's hospitality. By then, the tree itself was badly damaged by the ravages of time, the eagerness of pilgrims to remove branches and slices of bark, and a lightning strike. Much of it, drawings and photographs indicate, was leafless and stripped of bark, supported by ungainly splints to prop up sagging branches. One visitor lamented its "sad look."

The growing stature of Hebron as a tourist attraction was confirmed with the publication of Baedeker's *Palestine and Syria* in 1876. Praised as the first modern travel guide for "anyone interested in the land of the Bible," it provided a detailed description of sites along the road from Jerusalem to Hebron, nearly a seven-hour carriage ride. (The first paved road between the cities was still more than a decade away.) Described as "a town of hoar antiquity," Hebron nestled in "extremely fertile" surroundings, where grapevines and almond and apricot trees flourished. Its population was estimated at 8,000 to 10,000, including 500 Jews. Guest accommodations at several Jewish homes were described as "tolerable." Local merchants still traded extensively with nomadic Bedouin, while water skins made from goat hides, along with glass lamps and jewelry, remained the major local manufacturing products.

The most important building, "of unique interest," was the *Haram* (Machpelah) enclosure, which was surrounded by "the dwellings of dervishes, saints, and the guards of the mosque." But tourists could go no further than the main entry doors, because—as so many visitors had already discovered—"Muslim fanaticism precludes their nearer approach." They could not, therefore, admire "the finely carved pulpit" dating from 1091 or the "beautiful and costly pieces of oriental silk richly embroidered with gold" that adorned the cenotaphs of the patriarchs and matriarchs. Indeed, visitors to the "small town" of *El-Khalil* were prudently warned that "the Muslims of Hebron are notorious for their fanaticism, and the traveler should therefore avoid coming into collision with them."

Toward the end of the century, there was increasing evidence of community vitality and growth. Although Jews constituted a lower percentage of the local population than they did in the major Jewish population centers of Jerusalem, Tiberias, Safed, Jaffa, and Haifa, according to various estimates their numbers increased substantially after 1890. By 1910, nearly 1,500 Jewish residents were one-tenth of Hebron's population. With the influx of yeshiva students, it had also become a significantly younger community: nearly 70 percent of Hebron Jews were under the age of thirty.

Jewish land purchases were also increasing. It was recorded that "Mercado the Jew from Kushta" purchased a tract of land from "the aged gentleman Khalil son of the late Haj Ibrahim Abu Amar Seaj" for 4,000

grush. Yisrael Avraham Romano of Constantinople bought land near the Jewish Quarter and financed the construction of “a large and elaborate home” with many rooms. Beit Romano became a place of welcome to visiting Sephardic Jews from Turkey who funded its expansion into the “Istanbuli” synagogue.

Communal institutions proliferated to meet the needs of the expanding population. Rabbi Mani had built a synagogue and a public library and with Montefiore funding attempted to develop Jewish agricultural settlements around Hebron. In 1893, wealthy families from Baghdad funded the construction of the *Hesed l'Avraham* clinic, the only modern medical facility in Hebron. (Forty years earlier, Montefiore had tried to purchase an empty field for that purpose, but he declined to pay the exorbitant asking price of its Arab owner.) Expanded in 1909 with generous contributions from Joseph Avraham Shalom, a Baghdadi Jew, it became better known as Beit Hadassah after the Hadassah Women's Zionist Organization assumed responsibility for its medical staff, which provided free medical care to Jews and Arabs alike. The modern Anglo-Palestine Bank, founded in London in 1902 to serve as a credit institution for the World Zionist Organization, opened a branch in Hebron two years later that was owned by the Slonim family. It evidently prospered: an interior photograph reveals two finely carved wooden desks, one with a modern typewriter and a traditional *tzedakah* (charity) box bearing the symbol of the Star of David.

There were other signs of Jewish revitalization. By the turn of the century, there were four synagogues, including one for Chabad Hasidim, who, according to one visitor, “never stopped singing and dancing,” and three yeshivas. In 1901, Rabbi Haim Hizkiyahu Medini, newly arrived in Palestine, was invited to become Sephardic chief rabbi. He lived in Beit Romano, where he established a yeshiva and completed *Sde Hemed* (Beautiful Fields), a Talmudic encyclopedia. A photograph of a Talmud Torah school, taken a year later, showed a dozen teachers and as many as sixty boys. The *Torah Emet* yeshiva, established by Chabad Rabbi Shalom Dov of Lubavich, opened in 1912. The Cheda library was reputed to possess 10,000 books that Jews who were expelled from Spain in 1492 brought with them to Italy and then to Palestine. In addition to the Beit Hadassah medical clinic, there was a *mikveh* (ritual bath), two guesthouses, and two places (at least) where, despite strict local Muslim prohibition, alcoholic beverages were available.

There was also discernible evidence of increasing Jewish assertiveness. Doorpost niches for *mezuzot* were common, and a number of homes displayed exterior carvings of the Star of David. A photograph shows one doorway lintel with three carved *hanukiot*, the middle one upside down as a symbol of the destroyed Temple. A Jewish resident recalled that by

the eve of the Sabbath, "the narrow alleys of the Jewish Quarter have been scrubbed in honor of the holy day. The song *Lecha Dodi*, welcoming the Sabbath Queen, reverberates through the Quarter." Worshipers, dressed in white and wrapped in prayer shawls, gathered in the Avraham Avinu synagogue courtyard, facing the Judean hills as they sang. Once inside the synagogue, amid the glow of oil lamps, they circled the ark, chanting their prayers.

During the month of Elul, preceding Rosh Hashanah, Hebron usually was filled with hundreds of visiting young men from as far away as Sidon and Damascus. Greeted by community leaders and youngsters alike, they were welcomed with songs and accompanied to local inns. In the evenings, after prayer-filled days in synagogues and outside the Cave of Machpelah, "they would dance and sing, and the entire community would come to the inn to participate in the festivities."

Relations between the Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities seem to have become more cordial. Inter-marriage had become a subject of speculation and even consideration. Some Sephardic men complained that Ashkenazi women did not speak Spanish, nor were they prepared to cook "*mizrahi* [Eastern] food." But Ashkenazi men approved of inter-marriage because Sephardic women were reputed to make "great housewives"; they were, in a word, "obedient." Sephardic men, however, were criticized because "they were not religious enough and too strict at home."

A story by Yitzhaq Shami provides a Sephardic perspective on inter-communal differences. Born in Hebron in 1889, he spoke Ladino with his mother and Arabic with his father. Like other Jewish boys in Hebron, Shami studied traditional texts in religious schools, but he also began to read modern Hebrew. At sixteen, he left Hebron for the Ezra school in Jerusalem, where he was trained as a teacher and became a writer.

The Hebron of his childhood remained deeply etched in Shami's consciousness. His evocative descriptions drew on boyhood memories—"the dirty, curving alleys"; "the paupers and the cripples thronging around the entrance of the charity kitchen at the outer gate of the Cave of Machpelah"; men who were "yellowed and wrinkled, worn out by life and labor"; and "bowed and withered women who crept along, making strange buzzing noises in their toothless mouths." One of his fictional characters, *Hakham* Bekhor, grew up with the "lifelong belief" that Ashkenazi men would not permit a Sephardic Jew to participate in their synagogue prayers. Although his apprehension was finally dispelled, the Hasidic men "struck him as strange and ridiculous, standing at their lecterns with their eyes shut, swaying to and fro like reeds, black hats tilted back, curly sidelocks swinging."

Serious intracommunal divisions occasionally surfaced: twenty-seven Hebronites complained to the wife of the British consul in Jerusalem

about the depletion of funds by their secretary, and a prolonged conflict of murky origin produced rival factions in the Sephardic community. But the worst dangers were external. Hebron Muslims were notorious for their religious zeal and propensity for violence. “The treacherous Hebronites” described by Shami, whose stories contained sharp perceptions of local Arab culture, “held zealously to the time-honored tradition of blood vengeance.” Their “vile plots and intrigues” were familiar to Palestinian Arabs in Nablus, Bethlehem, and Jerusalem. Even a Cairo sheikh knew about the Hebronites, “whose stink can be smelled at great distances.”

Hebron Jews, if spiritually enriched in their synagogues and yeshivas by study and prayer, remained materially impoverished. Just before the century turned, a Jewish visitor described their “pitiful plight.” Although some Jews had built “fine and beautiful” homes on the outskirts of town after the main road to Jerusalem was paved, the Jewish Quarter remained “dirty, dark, narrow, vaulted, unevenly paved, running with liquid slime—such are the streets of Hebron.” The visitor described it as “streets within streets, dirt within dirt, room over room, in hopeless intricacy.” A typical dwelling consisted of a single room with a small barred window. There was a bed, a cooking stove, and a water pitcher—and nothing else except “a deep stagnant mud pool, which filled the centre of the floor.” Hebron Jews, he concluded, were “miserably poor. How they live is a mystery.”

Especially in winter, Hebron seemed chillingly dank and dismal. Shami recalled, “A day of cold and drizzle. Low leaden skies, mud, slush.” A heavy mist “that looked like frozen smoke” hung over the town, where runoff from the surrounding hills—“streams of murky water”—carried “silt and the decay of vine leaves to the lower streets and houses and shops.” But the aura of religious sanctity in the City of the Patriarchs, still revered by many Orthodox Jews as Jerusalem’s “sister city,” remained palpable.

The nascent Zionist movement paid little attention to Hebron—or, indeed, Jerusalem—at the end of the nineteenth century. Herzl’s *Altneuland* located the future of Zionism in secular Haifa; Jerusalem would become the model of a modern international city, more the symbol of a glittering universalistic future than the parochial Jewish past. Not until 1913, when Menachem Ussishkin addressed the Zionist Congress, was Jerusalem publicly identified as Palestine’s “national center.” There, Ussishkin suggested, an appropriately Zionist “temple of culture and learning”—a new national university—would be built on Mount Zion to replace the ancient Temple. Nothing was said about Hebron.

World War I transformed Palestine into “a disaster zone.” Amid severe privation and hardship, young men fled to avoid conscription into Turk-

ish labor brigades, famine and disease decimated the population, charitable donations from abroad dried up, and religious communities lived at the edge of starvation. The Balfour Declaration of 1917, promising a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine, infuriated local Muslims and heightened intercommunal tension.

That December, as General Allenby and his British forces neared Jerusalem, a small contingent of soldiers, led by chief political officer Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, detoured to Hebron. Using his military authority to enter Machpelah, normally closed to non-Muslims except for occasional European royalty, he spotted a half-open door leading to a rocky downward slope. Lighting matches as he descended, Meinertzhagen found himself in a subterranean chamber blocked at one end by a large boulder. He could go no further.

Visually, little seemed to have changed in Hebron. A postwar photograph shows a Sephardic Jew still wearing an Ottoman fez and a jacket over his long robe. The bleakness of the old medieval quarter, its arched stone buildings spanning the narrow streets and alleys, was evident. Without a visible tree or patch of grass, the cramped squalor of the ghetto contrasted sharply with the lush valleys and fields surrounding the city.

After the war ended, tension between Arabs and Jews became palpable throughout Palestine, and violence erupted in Jerusalem. In Hebron, British authorities, the new occupying power, attempted to defuse rising intercommunal acrimony by establishing a "Union Club" that included local Arab and Jewish notables. Murshid Shahin, a police officer in Hebron under Ottoman rule who hoped to regain his position, was an eager participant in reconciliation efforts. The Jewish community was pleased. He "leans to our side on all our issues," wrote Chief Rabbi Yakov Yosef Slonim, "from the first moment and with all the warmth of his heart." It was an encouraging augury of new possibilities.

But the postwar Jewish community in Hebron was more vulnerable than it had been in half a century. With young men in wartime flight to escape conscription, its population had declined sharply—only 430 Jews remained in the city among more than 16,000 Arabs. The arrival of waves of European Jews in Palestine strengthened Zionist claims for statehood but provoked rising Muslim hostility. The irreconcilable national claims of two peoples for the same land made conflict inevitable.

4



Catastrophe

In mid-decade, the Hebron Jewish community was unexpectedly revitalized by the relocation of the renowned *Knesset Israel* yeshiva from Slobodka in Lithuania. The founder of the yeshiva, Rabbi Nathan Zvi ben Moses Finkel, was known to his devoted students as the “*Saba* [grandfather] from Slobodka.” He had been a child prodigy who, by the age of fifteen, had already gained wide recognition as a distinguished scholar. Rabbi Finkel sent emissaries all over Europe to recruit promising students. In tiny, impoverished Slobodka, across the river from Kovno, they were educated to become scholars and community leaders. He became the leader of the Musar movement, which emphasized ethical obligation over rigorous Talmudic analysis. By the mid-1920s, his creative response to the corrosive impact of modernity on Jewish tradition had attracted more than 500 students, including a cluster of newcomers from the United States.

Rabbi Finkel broke with the rigidly Orthodox yeshiva community. But he remained steadfast in his determination to educate students to resist the allure of misguided modern secular ideologies such as socialism, atheism, and Zionism—all of which were braided into the burgeoning movement for Jewish national revival in Palestine. In 1924, after the Lithuanian government discontinued its policy of exempting yeshiva students from military service, Rabbi Finkel decided to open a branch of the *Knesset Israel* yeshiva in Hebron. In a newly acquired two-story stone building located in an open field outside the Jewish Quarter, his students were taught to integrate tradition and modernity within a Jewish ethical framework.

The transplanted Slobodka yeshiva defied Orthodox religious education no less than the Zionist orthodoxies that flourished in Tel Aviv and in Galilee kibbutzim. There the newest waves of Jewish “settlers,” as they proudly called themselves, were sinking their roots deep into the coastal plain and northern hills of Palestine. Rabbi Finkel preferred Hebron, in the heart of biblical Judea, for the renewal of Jewish Orthodoxy. Determined to lead his students by personal example, he made *aliyah*, living in Hebron until his death in 1927.

The infusion of so many devoted scholars and eager students, dressed as modern businessmen without the beards, *pais* (side curls), and black clothing that typically identified Orthodox yeshiva students, transformed the Hebron Jewish community. A Slobodka student, writing from Lithuania just before the outbreak of war in Europe, described its distinctiveness: “Without a doubt, Slobodka was a true ‘ingathering of the exiles.’” Hundreds of Orthodox young men from all over the Jewish world—Moscow, Bukhara, Kamenetz, and even Chicago—had come to study in the *Knesset Israel* yeshiva:

But these yeshiva-boys did not resemble the ones in Brisk. . . . Here in Slobodka, they had the look of real big-city yeshiva scholars. All of them were smartly dressed, their clothes clean, stylish and well-tailored. On their heads, fedoras; or, in the warm summer months, straw hats, all in the latest style. Almost all carried walking-sticks. Even on their faces, not a trace of the old ways. . . . If there should come along a yeshiva-boy from Poland, wearing a long black gaberdine, he’d have to get rid of it right away. . . . It wouldn’t be too long before they’d have him looking like a proper Litvak.

But no sooner had a new era of modern Orthodoxy dawned in Hebron than the Jewish community was suddenly attacked and viciously decimated by its Arab neighbors. Tension in Palestine between Arabs and Jews, accompanied by occasional waves of violence, had surged with the beginning of British Mandatory rule after World War I. Zionist land purchases and settlement increased Arab anxieties; struggles over Jewish access to the Western Wall added religious passion to the deepening conflict. In August 1929, Palestinian Arabs were incited to impassioned fury by the harangues of Haj Amin-al-Husseini, the mufti of Jerusalem. His allegations that Jews intended to “usurp” the Western Wall and endanger Muslim holy sites on the Temple Mount aroused his followers throughout Palestine.

The stabbing to death of a Jewish boy in Jerusalem on August 17 was an ominous portent. In Hebron, Assistant Superintendent of Police Raymond Cafferata was concerned. The solitary British police officer in the town, Cafferata had recently been transferred from Haifa in recognition of his effective enforcement of peaceful intergroup relations there. He

met with Arab notables and Jewish leaders, concluding that “the information was unanimous to the effect that any trouble . . . was out of the question. . . . The Jewish attitude was that they had lived in Hebron for generations; that they were known to the Arabs well and that they were the best of friends.”

But that same week, Haim Bagayo, a teacher and ritual slaughterer in Hebron, encountered a group of several dozen Arab men, led by local Sheikh Mohammed Ja’bari, who became visibly angered at the mere sight of a Jew. Bagayo heard the sheikh say, “To-day you must not touch a Jew . . . that will be next Friday.” Outside the shop of Amin Ben Hussein Badar, Bagayo was warned, “This time we are going to butcher you all.”

After Muslim prayer on Friday, August 23, violent clashes in Jerusalem left three Jews and three Arabs dead. That afternoon, an agitated Arab sped to Hebron by motorcycle to relay hysterical rumors that the blood of Muslims was being shed like water. As grisly distortions of the disturbances spread with the arrival of more Arabs from Jerusalem, Muslim fury surged through Hebron and nearby villages.

Hebron Jews refused to believe that their Arab neighbors, with whom they had lived in relatively peaceful coexistence for four centuries, meant them harm. Haim Bagayo recounted that his family had “lived happily” among Arabs in Hebron for nearly 400 years, “until the very last day.” Many years later, a Hebron yeshiva student would recall, “The Arabs were a very friendly people to us. . . . We lived very well with them in Hebron.” Just a day earlier, Eliezer Dan Slonim, the respected owner of the local branch of the Anglo-Palestine bank who served as the only Jew on the Hebron municipal council, had declined the offer of military weapons or assistance from several Haganah fighters who came to Hebron to warn of impending violence. Although Slonim had earlier that year received a government license to carry a firearm for self-protection, he requested that they take their guns and leave Hebron, lest their presence prove inflammatory.

At a meeting with Chief Rabbis Slonim and Franco, officer Cafferata was warned, based on “reliable and trustworthy” reports, that Hebron Muslims were “preparing to attack the Jews.” But District Officer Abdullah Kardous, who attended the meeting, assured the rabbis that government officials “had the situation well in hand.” At an evening gathering, local *mukhtars* affirmed to Kardous “that there was nothing to fear at all.” On Friday, August 23, Cafferata wrote, “Everything appeared normal.”

But Rabbi Aharon Reuven Bemzweig, who had accompanied his ailing wife from Tel Aviv to Hebron for a healing change of climate during the midsummer heat, was deeply apprehensive:

We had forebodings that something terrible was about to happen—but what, exactly, we did not know. I was fearful and kept questioning the local people,

who had lived there for generations. They assured me that in Hebron there could never be a pogrom, because as many times as there had been trouble elsewhere in Eretz Yisrael, Hebron had remained quiet. But my heart told me that the situation was serious. . . . What could we do to protect ourselves? We could only comfort ourselves with the hope that God, blessed be He, would have mercy, and the troubles would run their course quietly.

It proved to be a tragically futile hope. That Friday afternoon, shortly after Cafferata had received assurances from Sheikh Ja'bari that "whatever happened in Jerusalem nothing would happen in Hebron," Arabs began to attack Jews with clubs. Jewish shops were quickly closed, and owners fled for the safety of their homes. By mid-afternoon, incited by Sheikh Taleb Markha's frenzied claim that the blood of "thousands" of Muslims was being shed in Jerusalem, hundreds of Hebron Arabs, including many local notables joined by marauders from nearby villagers, began stoning Jewish houses on the Jerusalem Road, while Jews, "shouting and shrieking" in fear, climbed to their rooftops to call for help.

Near sundown, the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, a frenzied Arab mob broke into the main Hebron yeshiva, where a solitary student, Shmuel Rosenhaltz, had remained behind to study. Pelted by stones and with blood from serious head wounds pouring over the pages of his text, he stumbled toward the door, where he was stabbed to death. Yosef Lazarovski recalled walking that evening with his grandfather, parents, and three siblings, carrying pots of food—"our cholent, our soup, our gefilte fish"—to the Slonim house for a Sabbath meal. "I remember the seriousness in my father's eyes as he looked at me and my two sisters . . . as if he was thinking, 'What awaits them? How will I protect them?'"

That night, with Jews warned to remain inside their homes, police on horseback, joined by foot patrols, maintained a precarious calm. Cafferata, with only one Jewish constable and thirty Arabs under his command, telephoned police headquarters in Gaza, Jerusalem, and Jaffa for reinforcements, but amid the widespread rioting none were available. Early the next morning, cars filled with Arabs from nearby villages, screaming *Allah akbar* ("God is great") and *Itbach al Yahud* ("Kill the Jews"), sped through the streets of Hebron. Rabbi Bemzweig recounted, "Right after eight o'clock in the morning we heard screams. Arabs, armed [with iron bars, sledgehammers, knives, and axes], had begun breaking into Jewish homes. The screams pierced the heart of the heavens. We didn't know what to do."

An Arab mob gathered outside the Heichel house at the edge of town. Suddenly, "the iron front door of the house was opened and two Jewish youths rushed out shouting. . . . The mob surged round and stoned them to death." Officer Cafferata followed the Arab rioters into the Jew-

ish Quarter. "On hearing screams in a room I went up a sort of tunnel passage and saw an Arab in the act of cutting off a child's head with a sword. . . . I shot him low in the groin." Behind him was a Jewish woman "smothered in blood," an Arab policeman standing over her with a dagger. Cafferata shot him.

More than seventy terrified Jews, including family members and yeshiva students, had crowded into Eliezer Dan Slonim's spacious house, where they believed that his esteem in the Hebron community would protect them. Wrapped in prayer shawls, men began the morning service. They were interrupted by the pounding of bars and axes, accompanied by the sound of shattering glass. Yeshiva students barricaded the front door with furniture, but the Arab mob pushed the barriers aside and poured into the house. Young Lazarovski saw "a brown-skinned Arab with a large mustache breaking through the door. He had a large knife and an ax, . . . full of fury . . . and then I remember another Arab . . . with an ax that he brought down on my grandfather's neck." A student, Yisrael Mordechai Kaplan, was shot to death. Hysterical screams of "*Sh'ma Yisrael*" resounded through the house. Slonim attempted to fire his pistol at one of the Arab rioters, but it jammed just before his head was split open by a metal bar. The throats of Jews were cut, leaving pools of blood on the stone floor and, seeping from above, splashes of blood on the twelve-foot-high ceiling.

Virtually the entire Slonim family, including his wife Hannah and their son, his father-in-law, the chief rabbi of Zichron Yaakov, and his wife, was slaughtered. The sole survivor, one-year-old Shlomo, was discovered, blood drenched and wounded, beneath the corpses of his relatives. His look of abject terror, captured in a photograph, reflected the horror he had witnessed but could not begin to describe. A visiting tourist, Y. L. Grodzinsky, heard "the shrieks of the women and the babies' wailing" reverberate through the Slonim house. When he emerged from hiding, he saw "a sea of blood" from victims with "knife and hatchet wounds in their heads. . . . A few bodies had been slashed and their entrails had come out." Twenty-two Jews were murdered there. In the wreckage-strewn, blood-spattered living room, virtually the only intact object was a large photograph on the wall, a portrait of Theodor Herzl.

Elsewhere in Hebron, Rabbi Hanoch Hasson, along with his entire family, was murdered. Ben-Zion Gershon, the Beit Hadassah pharmacist who served Jews and Arabs alike, had his eyes gouged out before he was stabbed to death. The hands of his wife were cut off before she and their daughter were murdered. Four-year-old Shalom Goldshmidt and his sister survived by hiding under a bed; their mother and another sister were killed, and their father was tortured to death by Arabs who held his head over a burning kerosene stove. Two-year-old Menachem Segal, one

of three children under the age of five who was murdered, had his head torn off.

In the main room of the Anglo-Palestine bank, where twenty-three corpses were discovered, blood covered the tile floor “like thick jelly.” Arabs “knocked down thirteen-year-old girls, mothers, and grandmothers in the blood and raped them in unison.” Six yeshiva students were successively seated on the lap of Mrs. Sokolov; then, “one by one, [Arabs] slit their throats.” Among the murdered students were eight Americans, including two sixteen-year-olds. One of the survivors, a student from Chicago, recounted that he “had seen greater horrors than Dante in hell.”

The grisly toll mounted. The entire Lazarovsky family, except for one son, was slaughtered. Rabbis Meir Kastel and Tzvi Drabkin, with five of their students, were tortured, castrated, and murdered. Rabbi Yakov Orlanski HaCohen had his brain removed from his skull. Moshe Arbiter, a yeshiva student from the United States, had two fingers chopped off; Elchanan Zeligroch, another student, had one hand severed at the wrist; and Liba Segal lost four fingers. There were reports of amputated penises and breasts.

Some Jews survived because, “like terrified rabbits,” they managed to hide in undiscovered places. Six-month-old Hannah Mizrahi was almost suffocated by her father to prevent her cries from revealing their hiding place; she stopped just in time to save their lives. Rabbi Bemzweig recalled,

As we lay there on the floor, we heard the screams as Arabs were slaughtering Jews. It was unbearable. . . . Each one of us said his *vidui* [confession]. . . . We had not even the slightest hope of remaining alive. We just begged that it should already be done and over. . . .

We continued to lie there, waiting for the Angel of Death to finish with us as quickly as possible.

Others owed their lives to a scattering of brave local Arabs who protected them. Most courageously, Haj Eissa el-Kourdieh, who lived in the Jewish Quarter, sheltered thirty-five Jews in his basement and stood guard outside to ensure their safety. Sixteen-year-old Zmira Mani, terrified by the carnage, lost hope of being saved and ran to the roof, planning to commit suicide by jumping. She was pulled back, rescued by Abu Id Zaitoun, an Arab neighbor who brought his brother and son to protect surviving members of the Mani family. Guarding them with swords, they found a policeman to transport them to safety in police headquarters in Beit Romano. Eight-year-old Rivka Slonim Burg, the daughter of the chief rabbi of the Ashkenazi community, hid behind their neighbor Abu Shaker, who shielded several family members. Imm Mahmoud left her ten-year-old son with Jews who were hiding in her home to reassure them

that she would conceal their presence. She instructed him to respond to any call for Jews: "No, there are no Jews here. They all ran away." In a community of nearly 20,000 Arabs, perhaps two dozen protected or rescued their Jewish neighbors, far fewer than the many hundreds who assaulted and murdered them.

For nearly two hours, while Jews were raped, murdered, and mutilated, police did little to stop the grisly slaughter. Chanoch Brodztzsky, the solitary Jewish policeman, tried in vain to halt the mob. In a book salvaged from the Slonim house, he wrote, "On that same day I killed six Arabs, one of whom was a *policeman*." When officer Cafferata, fearing for his personal safety, finally fired a few shots into the air, the mobs quickly dispersed. By the time the grisly slaughter subsided, nearly sixty Jews, including twenty-three yeshiva students, were dead; the death toll finally reached sixty-seven. Ashkenazi Jews, imagined by local Arabs to be Zionists because of their Western clothing, were prime targets: fifty-five were killed, along with twelve Sephardim. Six synagogues were desecrated; sixty-four Torah scrolls, some dating from the Spanish exile, were stolen or mutilated. At the venerable Avraham Avinu synagogue, the ark was ravaged. Holy books were burned. Yeshiva study halls were pillaged.

More than 400 Jewish survivors were brought to the Hebron police station in Beit Romano. According to local medical officer, Dr. A. Abdel Al, many suffered from "deep stab wounds inflicted by cutting, sharp and blunt instruments, such as knives, swords, choppers, stones, sticks." Pandemonium raged:

As people told each other about their misfortunes and how many casualties they had suffered, there erupted a terrible outcry, everyone shrieking and weeping at the same time. It was unbearable. Blessed God, give us strength! It was beyond human endurance. Three women went out of their minds right there.

Confined to the basement, Jews "lay on the ground in filth, just listening to the crying and groaning" of wounded survivors. With the sacking of the Beit Hadassah clinic, no medical supplies were available for those who had been slashed, hacked, and mutilated. After the end of the Jewish Sabbath, fifty-eight members of the community—fifty-one men and seven women—were hastily buried in a common grave in the ancient Hebron cemetery. (Nine others died of their wounds elsewhere.) The British permitted only the bare minimum of mourners required to recite *Kaddish* to attend the night funeral. A separate grave was dug for mutilated body parts.

After three days and nights of tortured misery and hunger on the blood-soaked floor, British soldiers evacuated the remnant of the Jewish community of Hebron—484 Jews, including 153 children—in a mournful

caravan to Jerusalem. Photographs, taken a few days later in the Strauss hospice, revealed the stunned faces of survivors. Many were bandaged; some displayed mutilated hands, with fingers—or an entire hand—missing. In a group photo, a solitary Slobodka student, easily recognizable in his straw hat, stood incongruously among the others.

Many years later, some Sephardic Jews who were young children in 1929 remembered—or, perhaps, embellished—the “good life” they had enjoyed in Hebron before the massacre. Hebron Arabs were “very friendly”; there were “no political problems, ever”; and Jewish families had enjoyed summer camping in the vineyards of hospitable local Arabs. Their idyll, they believed, had been shattered by the arrival of Ashkenazi Jews, the Slobodka students who came to “spoil everything.”

But it took other survivors seventy years to confront the trauma of 1929. “We never talked about it,” one recalled. “To this day I have nightmares about it,” said another. “The word ‘Hebron’ was never mentioned at home.” Zmira Mani never revealed what she had witnessed on the day when she decided that there was no God. But a day after the massacre, she wrote down her memories of it under the heading “What I Saw,” which she concealed until the birth of her granddaughter six decades later.

Ten days after the carnage, Zionist officials and the chief rabbinate sent a blistering letter to the British high commissioner: “The guilt of the officers of the Government was expressed at its worst in the butchery at Hebron.” It was, they wrote, “a butchery without equal in the history of the country since the destruction of the Temple, and one which could have been promptly suppressed by a few shots fired in the air.” But for the handfuls of Arabs who protected them, “not one Jewish soul would have survived in Hebron.” Local Arabs, in turn, condemned the “scandals of Jewish propaganda,” preposterously declaring, “No atrocities” and “No mutilations.”

Sir Walter Shaw, chairman of an exhaustive royal investigation of “the Palestine Disturbances,” concluded that “unspeakable atrocities have occurred in Hebron.” Sir John Chancellor, the British high commissioner, visited Hebron in October and wrote to his son, “The horror of it is beyond words. In one of the houses I visited not less than twenty-five Jews men and women were murdered in cold blood.” Sheikh Maraka, who led the Arab mob in its murderous rampage, received a two-year jail sentence for inciting conduct offensive to persons of another religion. He served one month. Officer Cafferata received a medal for personal gallantry.

The elderly Rabbi Jacob Joseph Slonim (father of Eliezer Dan Slonim), whose family had been all but obliterated, was bereft. A year after the massacre, he wrote,

For which of the two shall I weep? For Hebron, the graves of the patriarchs, or for Hebron, the grave of my son? . . . I make my stand and call upon my

people. Place a memorial stone for the saints and the highest of the pure, build the ruined Hebron, build the city of the patriarchs!

Efforts were made to restore the devastated community, but the Zionist Organization was unresponsive to appeals for Hebron Jews, who had demonstrated little enthusiasm for Zionism. In an anguished plea, titled "I Will Not Be Silent," Rabbi Slonim wrote,

My father's fathers built the Ashkenazi settlement in the middle of the sixteenth century. The settlement was always under attack but generation after generation they continued to build and rebuild their holy city. The goal of my life is the strengthening of this community. And I ask you what are your plans in aiding the community in Hebron. . . . You are devastating the community in Hebron and it will never grow and no one will go back. I will not be silent and I will not rest and I know others will follow me and will go to the Jews in the diaspora for support. Hebron will be a great city.

"What Happened in Palestine?" asked Maurice Samuel, a popular American writer and Zionist advocate who published a book by that title later in 1929. Arriving in July for a visit, he had spent six weeks in Tel Aviv, where he witnessed Jews organizing for self-defense amid forebodings of violence. But Hebron Jews, he wrote dismissively, lived within "the traditions of the Middle Ages," concerned only with "the remotest past and with the remotest future, with the beginning and the end of things." Unwilling or unable to plan for their own self-defense, they were but "dwindling memorials of the times when Jews had ceased to hope for human release from human oppression, when they asserted their claim to Palestine only by going to die there."

Samuel shared the common Zionist delusion that local Arabs appreciated Jewish neighbors for their determination "to build in peace and friendship." He insisted, "Every visible effect of Jewish reconstruction on Arab life is economically and intellectually beneficial." To Zionists it was British rule—not the provocative Zionist presence in Palestine or even Arab hostility—that was the primary source of Arab-Jewish conflict.

Samuel's attempt to shift responsibility from Arab marauders and murderers to British Mandatory authorities was common in Zionist circles. Just a year earlier, after a violent incident at the Western Wall, David Ben-Gurion had insisted, "It is not a dispute between the Arabs and us. The [British] Government has offered us offense—not the Arabs." After the 1929 riots, the Jewish press resoundingly echoed Ben-Gurion. The left-wing *HaPoel Ha-Tzair*, recounting the Arab "butchery" in Hebron, nonetheless insisted, "We have no dispute with the Arab nation," which was "blindly misled by political agitators. . . . But we have a case against the British government," whose duty it was to prevent such disasters.

Davar condemned unspecified “groups of murderers and robbers” while explicitly noting that Hebron Arabs had also suffered casualties during the rioting. Ultimate responsibility rested not with Arabs but with “British officials.”

With Labor Zionists persistently misreading Arab hostility toward Jewish settlement as merely a “misunderstanding,” it was easier to blame the British—or religious Jews—for the massacre than its murderous Arab perpetrators. Although British authorities surely deserved condemnation for their tepid responses to lethal Arab attacks in Hebron, they hardly bore primary responsibility for the bloody violence of August 24. Once Hebron Arabs were held accountable, however, uncomfortable questions would necessarily arise about the provocative Jewish presence in Palestine that Zionist politicians and newspaper editors fervently wished to stifle.

If there was palpable Zionist anger toward the British, there was muted Zionist sympathy for the tragic plight of Hebron Jews. Religious Jews who wished only to study, pray, and die in Hebron, not rebuild Palestine according to Labor Zionist specifications, received little compassion. The Orthodox rabbinate and secular Zionist leadership were Jewish worlds apart from each other, and mutual currents of acrimony and animosity ran deep. To the Orthodox, Zionists were “godless atheists”; to Zionists, Orthodox Jews were shamefully timid and passive victims of their own self-imposed ghetto norms. In Hebron, after all, enthusiasm for secular Zionism, other than the portrait of Herzl in Eliezer Dan Slonim’s living room, was rarely displayed. Most of the massacre victims, like most Hebron Jews (including the Slobodka yeshiva students), did not identify with the Zionist cause.

To the hostile Zionist press, Hebron was just another “city of slaughter” (alluding to Zionist poet Chaim Nachman Bialik’s bitter denunciation of Jewish passivity during the Kishinev pogrom twenty-six years earlier). Jews evidently preferred to cower and hide while their women and children were raped and murdered. In descriptions lifted from Bialik’s poem, the newspaper *Davar* focused on Hebron Jews who had taken flight from their attackers and hidden in filthy holes. Zionist editorials dismissed them as “a disgrace to Zionism.” Hebron Jews, a critic wrote, died “an utterly immoral death.” *Doar ha-Yom* described a community of Jews that had “gone to the slaughter like sheep.” *Haaretz*, headlining its report “In the City of Slaughter,” drew invidious comparisons between the behavior of Hebron Jews and the passivity of Russian Jews during pogroms. Almost grudgingly, it displayed a measure of sympathy for “the most peaceful segment of the population in a place where Jews had lived from time immemorial.”

Yet when Sephardic chief rabbi Franco was asked by the Shaw Commission whether he considered himself to be a Zionist, he responded, “We are

all Zionists. In our services, in our prayers, three times a day we mention the name of Zion and we hope for the rebuilding of Zion." Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Ha-Cohen Kook, chief rabbi of Mandatory Palestine, explained to the commission, "It is the permanent command to Israel to be always linked up with this land. . . . It is our duty, as far as it is within our power, to settle the devastated barren land." Decades later, Rabbi Slonim's grandson insisted, with some retrospective exaggeration, "Many members of the community . . . both Sephardic and Ashkenazi were ardent Zionists. They did not see any conflict between being Orthodox and Zionist."

Whether or not they identified with political Zionism, Hebron Jews paid dearly for Arab hostility, British indifference, and their own vulnerability. The trauma of 1929 was seared into memory as "Tarpap," the acronym for its date (5689) in the Hebrew calendar. The bloodiest massacre of Jews in Hebron since the Bar Kokhba rebellion in the second century, it virtually extinguished the most ancient Jewish community in Palestine. Encouraged by the elderly Rabbi Slonim's persistent efforts but with little support from Zionist officials, thirty families—comprising more than 150 Jews, mostly from the Sephardic community—planned their return to Hebron in 1931.

Local Arabs were, at best, ambivalent. A Zionist official met with the president of the Hebron Chamber of Commerce, who favored the return of Jews: "The Jews have a claim to be natives of this city no less than we do." Their return might even spur economic development in the town. Several Hebron dignitaries recounted a recent meeting with King Ibn Saud during their pilgrimage to Mecca. He had sharply reprimanded them, asking, "How will the Prophet pray for you when you have washed your hands in the blood of women and babies. . . . Shame, shame and disgrace for you leaders of the city." A local Arab, shrugging off the 1929 massacre as "God's will," predicted that if returning Jews came with money and created economic opportunities for Arabs, there might be "unity among the two nations."

Accompanied by two Jewish police officers for protection, the Jewish families valiantly attempted to rebuild. New community officers were elected. Emissaries were once again sent abroad to raise money. S. Mousaieff, a former member of the Jewish Community Council of Jerusalem, urged the Jewish National Fund to acquire property along the Jerusalem-Hebron road that "will push these two cities to unite." Nothing came of his proposal. A hotel reopened for Jewish visitors. But few Jews came to Hebron.

Then, in 1936, a new and far more menacing Arab revolt spread violence throughout Palestine. British authorities, perhaps anticipating another massacre that they would once again be blamed for not preventing, ordered the evacuation of Jews from Hebron. After the Passover holiday,

as though in cruel mimicry of the ancient Exodus, Jews once again departed from the City of the Patriarchs. The Jewish community of Hebron was no more.

One Jew decided to remain behind. Yaacov ben Shalom Ezra, an eighth-generation Hebronite whose family had arrived after the Spanish expulsion, had worked as a cheesemaker ever since his boyhood apprenticeship to his father. With assurances of protection from Arab friends, he stayed in Hebron, working all day with his young son Yosef at his side and locking them both in his dairy shop for safety at night. Returning to Jerusalem every Friday, father and son would rejoin their family for the Sabbath. For more than a decade, Ezra commuted weekly between Hebron and Jerusalem.

During his years in Hebron, Ezra diligently attended mourning ceremonies for his Arab neighbors. There he gathered local intelligence information to pass along to David Raziell, commander of the underground Irgun. But when the United Nations approved the partition of Palestine in November 1947, rising Arab fury made him fear for his life. Leaving Hebron for the final time, he returned to Jerusalem. There he died in June 1967, just a few days after the Israeli army triumphantly entered Hebron during the Six-Day War.

In one of the last photographs of the Avraham Avinu synagogue, taken after the 1936 evacuation but before Hebron Arabs and then Jordanians desecrated and destroyed the old building, its splendor was still evident. The ancient wooden door, brought from an abandoned Gaza synagogue centuries earlier, displayed beautifully etched designs, including Magen Davids and hex carvings. Beneath the vaulted ceiling was an elegant wooden *bima* with an intricately carved railing. A graceful *ner tamid* (eternal light), made of multicolored glass, hung suspended from the ceiling. The *aron* contained three Torah scrolls, one enclosed in a silver case. But once Jews left Hebron in 1936, virtually nothing remained of a 400-year-old community that could trace its origins, at least in memory, to the purchase of a burial cave in biblical antiquity.

In "My City," a mournful dirge (and embittered lament) for Hebron in 1929, Yehezkel Avissar compared the city of his childhood to "a loving mother." But he wondered, in anguish, "How come you became like a stepmother, foreign?"

How all of a sudden did you become
a traitorous sword
You gave into the hand of merciless men
to kill babies and fathers,
And an older man who is praying
wrapped in t'fillin

The guardian of the walls of tradition
and Torah?
How, and how you stood by and watched
That my sisters were slaughtered
In silence and in their innocent youth,
And you were calm and silent
With a stone heart, like an old tomb? . . .
How come you, the father of many nations,
You did not fight to protect your disciples,
At the time when we were attacked?
And you the mother, crying for your sons
In a cry that has lasted forever,
The cry was not heard all the way up,
In the bloody pogroms of 1929

5



Return

The birth of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, prompted an immediate declaration of war by seven Arab nations. When the fighting ended, a year later, Hebron was absorbed within the territory that became known as the West Bank of the Kingdom of Jordan. Under Jordanian rule, the last vestiges of a Jewish historical presence in Hebron were obliterated. The Avraham Avinu synagogue, already in ruins, was razed; a pen for goats, sheep, and donkeys was built on the site. The “Kabbalists’ Courtyard” adjacent to the synagogue was converted into a slaughterhouse, with a public toilet located nearby. Beit Romano and Beit Hadassah, among the oldest Jewish-owned properties in Hebron, were converted into elementary schools for Arab children. Abandoned Jewish property, seized by the Jordanian Alien Property Custodian, was rented cheaply to local Arabs for storerooms and barns for their livestock.

The ancient Jewish cemetery, where victims of the 1929 massacre were buried, was desecrated. The mass graves of Tarpat victims, their rows of oblong marble stones once tree shaded and enclosed, were in shattered ruins. Local Arabs helped themselves to tombstones for the walls and foundations of their homes. A house was built for an Arab watchman who converted much of the cemetery into an overgrown vegetable patch. During nineteen years of Jordanian occupation, the kingdom honored Hebron with several postage stamps and even a picture postcard of the venerable Mamre oak. Wealthy Jordanians vacationed in Hebron to escape the summer heat in Amman. But virtually all traces of millennia of Jewish life—and death—in Hebron had been obliterated.

In 1964, the Jordanian government extended permission to Philip C. Hammond, director of the American Expedition, to conduct the first professional archaeological excavations in Hebron. Prohibited from working within one kilometer of the Cave of Machpelah, the expedition focused on Tel Rumeida, the presumed site of ancient Hebron. There, amid strata suggesting “almost continuous habitation” back through the Iron and Bronze ages to the Chalcolithic period in the fourth millennium B.C.E. (significantly earlier than the assumed time of Abraham), it excavated part of the ancient city wall and its tower.

Few Israelis mourned the loss of Hebron. But in May 1967, on the eve of Israel Independence Day, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook spoke to a gathering of his former students at the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva in Jerusalem. The yeshiva was named in memory of his father, Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak Kook, the revered chief rabbi of Mandatory Palestine, who had passionately denounced the separation of Jewish nationalism from the religion of Judaism as an “abomination.” Insisting that secularism was the “poison” within Zionism, he nonetheless taught that Zionism and the State of Israel represented “sacred expressions of messianic redemption.” Challenging modern Jews to integrate Judaism and Zionism, Torah and holy land, Rabbi Kook anticipated the ultimate restoration of the ancient Jewish unity that had been torn asunder by conquest, exile, modernization, and secularism. But his challenge had been rejected by secular Zionists and religious Jews alike.

Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, his son, struggled after 1948 to transform his father’s yeshiva into the spiritual center for the renewal of Zionism that his father had passionately advocated. But the yeshiva languished, its embrace of Jewish statehood marginalizing it within the Orthodox community, while its Orthodoxy isolated it from mainstream secular Zionism. During the 1950s, a time of severe economic privation and massive immigrant absorption, Israeli culture offered Mercaz HaRav graduates few opportunities to satisfy their yearning to synthesize Zionism with Judaism.

At the Independence Day gathering in 1967, usually a festive occasion with enthusiastic singing and dancing, Rabbi Kook sorrowfully recalled his own feelings of despair nineteen years earlier, at the moment of Israel’s birth: “I was torn to pieces. I could not celebrate.” The arbitrary new boundaries of statehood, he reminded hundreds of former students and their guests, had cruelly severed the new State of Israel from the biblical Land of Israel. His soft voice, a listener recalled, “suddenly rose to crescendo, bewailing the partition of historic Eretz Israel.” Reciting the names of biblical cities that lay outside the borders of the young nation, Rabbi Kook cried out mournfully, “They have divided my land. Where is our Hebron? Have we forgotten it? And where is our Shechem? And our Jericho—will we forget them?”

Listeners were stunned. "He spoke like a man whose soul was torn asunder," recalled Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun. "It was as though his grief emanated from the deepest spiritual reservoirs. It was a chilling experience. No one present that night remained the same." Rabbi Kook's words elicited tears of remorse among his graduates, who suddenly realized that they had "sinned and forgotten" the sanctity of the land, their biblical patrimony. "No one in the country spoke like this," a student realized. "They thought the Land of Israel ended where the State of Israel ended." Rabbi Kook's speech, his former student Hanan Porat remembered, "echoed in us, as if . . . the spirit of prophecy had descended upon him." Another yeshiva graduate, Rabbi Moshe Levinger, was deeply moved.

Just one month later, at the end of the Six-Day War, Israelis confronted the stunning reality of new national boundaries that embraced virtually the entire biblical heartland of ancient Israel. The return to Judea and Samaria, from Shechem (Nablus) in the north to Hebron in the south, from Jericho in the east to Jerusalem, was the unanticipated consequence of an unwanted war. Determined to erase the lingering humiliation of 1948 and annihilate the Jewish state, Israel's Arab neighbors—Egypt, Syria, and Jordan—had inadvertently compelled the Zionist state to confront its Jewish past and future.

The spectacular Israeli victory climaxed in Jerusalem at the Western Wall. In a voice choked with emotion, Kol Israel radio broadcaster Rafi Amir announced to the entire nation, "At this moment, at this very moment, I am going down the steps to the Wall. I'm not religious and never have been, but this is the Wall and I am touching the stones of the Western Wall!" A soldier described his experience there: "I closed my eyes, took a small, hesitant step forward, and brought my lips to the Wall. The touch of my lips opened the gates of my emotions and the tears burst forth. A Jewish soldier in the State of Israel is kissing history with his lips." Army Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren blew his shofar in exultation before reciting *Kaddish* for slain soldiers and the *Shehehiyanu* prayer of thanksgiving. Soldiers who gathered at the Wall spontaneously sang *Hatikvah* and Naomi Shemer's newly popular ballad, *Yerushalyim Shel Zahav* (Jerusalem of Gold). Listening to the celebration in far-off Sinai, a soldier recalled, "We all felt how history was beating its wings."

With the return to Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, Yigal Yadin, the renowned archaeologist who had commanded Israel's army in 1948, reminded Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, "We have a long history with Hebron, going back to Abraham." The link between Jerusalem and Hebron, the ancient "sister cities," seemed inescapable to Yadin. Eshkol responded, "Have you already thought about how we can live with so many Arabs?" Yadin predicted confidently, "Once our forces arrive they will flee to the desert."

The next morning, the Israeli army moved south into the Hebron hills. Rabbi Goren, fearful that he might be left behind, commandeered a jeep and driver and managed to arrive in Hebron even before the first Israeli soldiers. With empty streets and bolted shutters, it seemed like a ghost town. Everywhere he looked, white surrender flags fluttered from the windows of Arab houses. Just the day before, local notables had gathered to discuss whether to resist or to surrender. Sheikh Ali Ja'bari, mayor of Hebron since 1947, had reason to fear Jewish vengeance for the 1929 massacre, in which his own family members had participated. The sheikh persuaded Hebron elders not to resist.

Rabbi Goren raced to Machpelah. Carrying a Torah scroll and an Israeli flag and blowing his shofar, he became the first Jew to enter in 700 years. The flag was raised outside the Machpelah enclosure, and a military officer met with Mayor Ja'bari to receive the unconditional surrender of the city. Once the appropriate documents were signed in the municipal building, Lieutenant Colonel Zvi Ofer, who dictated and accepted the surrender terms, established temporary Israeli military headquarters in the nearby Park Hotel.

The war ended in six days, for religious Israelis an echo of the miracle of biblical creation. David Ben-Gurion, the founding father of the Jewish state and its first prime minister, was taken on a triumphant tour of the Western Wall in Jerusalem, Rachel's tomb outside Bethlehem, and Machpelah in Hebron. The most ancient holy sites of the Jewish people, all of them beyond the boundaries of the Jewish state since 1948, had been reclaimed by Israel within twenty-four hours. Ben-Gurion, a self-taught Bible scholar, expressed some skepticism in his diary about "the whole Machpelah cave story. . . . Are Abraham's, Yitzhak's and Jacob's tombs really here?" Nonetheless, he met with Israeli Cabinet members to insist, "On Jerusalem we must not budge. We have to quickly establish a large Jewish settlement there. The same with Hebron."

In the Old City of Jerusalem, where no Jews had lived since their expulsion in 1948, ancient Jewish history and modern Zionism converged in an outpouring of triumphant nationalist and religious enthusiasm. The sanctity of the Western Wall evoked nearly 2,000 years of Jewish history, from the destruction of the Second Temple through nineteen centuries of exile to the miracle of return. There was virtually no question, either in government circles or in an exultant nation, but that this ancient holy site would remain under Israeli sovereignty.

The decision of the Eshkol government to reconstruct and repopulate the Jewish Quarter of the Old City was immediate, unambiguous, and virtually unanimous. Within hours after the fighting halted, Arabs were ordered to evacuate the Mughrabi Quarter, a ramshackle neighborhood built adjacent to the Western Wall primarily to impede the access of Jews

to their revered holy site. Bulldozers quickly demolished the dilapidated buildings, clearing space for an expansive plaza. In time, the restored Jewish Quarter would be crowded with apartment buildings, synagogues, yeshivas, shops, cafés, and an array of archaeological sites where newly discovered artifacts reconnected the Jewish people to their ancient past in their hallowed city.

In a ceremony two months later at the ancient Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan boldly proclaimed, “We have returned to all that is holy in our land. . . . We have returned to the cradle of our people, to the inheritance of the Patriarchs. . . . We have returned to the Mountain [the Temple Mount], to Hebron and to Nablus. We will not be parted from the holy places.” Nor was Dayan alone in his understanding of the meaning of victory. The Six-Day War, writer Amos Elon observed, “suddenly confronted Israel with its history.”

Hebron, isolated for nearly twenty years at the western edge of the Kingdom of Jordan, at the end of a road that led nowhere, had fallen on hard times. During the 1948 war, many Hebron Arabs—educated and prosperous residents conspicuous among them—had fled to Jerusalem, to northern West Bank cities, or to Jordan. With the city cut off from Beer-sheba, its traditional marketing center to the south (but within the borders of Israel after 1948), those who remained behind, joined by war refugees, suffered severe economic privation. Among the major West Bank towns, Hebron—the most religiously traditional, without a movie theater or a liquor store—was the least urbanized, with the slowest population growth. With little aid from the Jordanian government, many of its 38,000 Arab residents, impoverished and unhealthy, depended on local and foreign charities for sustenance.

To Ida Stoltzfus, a Mennonite missionary from Pennsylvania who came to Hebron with her twin sister in 1952 and stayed to run an orphanage for nearly forty years, the city was a dismal place: “The dark streets were no wider than the width of a doorway. . . . Sunlight never, or only for a few minutes a day, reached the dust of the street. The rooms on street level were dark, used as stables, or unused and filled with rubbish.” At a makeshift kitchen located outside the Machpelah enclosure, crowds of hungry Arabs gathered daily, “pushing, shoving, crying, and shouting” as they struggled with guardians of the mosque and local police for soup and bread. Ahead of the Israeli army in 1967, taxis, cars, trucks, and tractors, packed with people clutching their possessions, headed east to Jordan River crossings. Although the exodus was not quite as large as Yadin had predicted, Hebron had “the feeling of a deserted city.”

Not for long. Once the Six-Day War ended, Israelis visited Hebron by the thousands and then tens of thousands. “Nothing on the streets but Jewish cars and even buses,” Ida Stoltzfus wrote in her diary with

evident dismay. On a single June day, 70,000 Jewish visitors flooded the city, creating a traffic jam that lasted for six hours. Hebron, where no Jews had been seen for thirty years except for the captured fighters from Gush Etzion who were marched through its streets in 1948, suddenly was packed with Israelis, eager to explore the ancient city and visit the sacred tombs. The sight of armed Israeli soldiers, bearded religious Jews with *pais*, and young women wearing miniskirts and T-shirts, did not please local Muslim residents.

Although little but ruins remained of the old Jewish Quarter, the Machpelah enclosure, so long inaccessible to Jews, was packed with Israeli visitors. The army quickly demolished the southeastern stairway to the mosque, where for seven centuries Jews had been humiliated into halting on the seventh step. A new entrance was opened, and Jews streamed inside to pray, to recite Psalms, and to visit the burial sites of their patriarchs and matriarchs. In those first ecstatic June days, an observer could witness a Yemenite man joyously blowing repeated blasts on his shofar while, simultaneously, a French Jew chanted the biblical story of the *Akedah* and a Moroccan woman, wailing *Ima, Ima* ("Mother, Mother"), kissed the cenotaph marking Sarah's tomb.

Not all Israelis appreciated the encounter with their ancient heritage. A promising young writer, Amos Oz, confessed, "I don't have any feeling that Hebron's part of my homeland. But I do feel this about Holon," the dreary town outside Tel Aviv where he first fell in love. Holon, Oz wrote, "means much more to me than Hebron." Yigal Yadin sharply denounced the embrace and worship of national and religious relics as "idolatrous." As passionately and publicly as he had previously celebrated his own discovery of the bones of 900 suicidal Jewish Zealots at Masada, he now ridiculed Jews for praying inside Machpelah, which he scornfully dismissed as the likely site of tombs of Arab sheikhs, not Jewish patriarchs. Softening his tone after his remarks were sharply criticized, Yadin conceded, "This generation has created a new religion, the religion of history, a belief in the history of its people as a religious faith."

Indeed it had. But the religious passion released by the war was deeply disturbing to secular Zionists. For *Soldiers Talk*, the instant best-selling collection of war reminiscences (published in English as *The Seventh Day*), its left-wing editors (including Oz) chose to omit conversations with Mercaz HaRav students who "did not share the unease about victory and occupation." These kibbutz censors were concerned lest "vehement nationalistic messianism" overshadow the reflections of "innocent young soldiers, humanists in distress" (in journalist Tom Segev's words), who were filled with ambivalence about victory and hostility to religion.

For many Israelis during that euphoric summer of victorious return, the rediscovered holy sites from antiquity reconnected them with the deep-

est historical memories of the Jewish people. The Army Rabbinical Unit, headed by Rabbi Goren, immediately assumed responsibility for supervising religious affairs in Machpelah. An ark and a Torah were brought inside for Jewish worship. Just a week after the war ended, on the eve of Shavuot, a Jewish wedding was held in Hebron for the first time in thirty-eight years. Meir Broza, who had served in the first military unit to reach Hebron and was still bandaged from his war wounds, married Rachel Meyocas, whose parents had been exiled from Hebron in 1929. Hundreds of Israelis, many from Broza's army unit, attended. The traditional *huppa* (canopy) was tied to four guns mounted on jeeps. In July, before 1,000 assembled guests, eight army reservists were married by military rabbis outside the Cave of Machpelah.

The unanticipated presence of Israeli soldiers and tourists in Hebron provoked vigorous debate in government circles over the fruits of victory, the rights of conquest, the claims of history, and possibilities for peaceful coexistence. In Jerusalem, the Labor government had acted with alacrity, taking immediate steps to bulldoze the Arab neighborhood abutting the Western Wall and annex both the Old City and the Arab sector of east Jerusalem. But the government remained ambivalent, at best, about Hebron. Once an Orthodox enclave where expressions of Zionist sympathies were muted at best, it had become an Arab city after 1929.

Like other secular Zionists in the Israeli government, Defense Minister Dayan embraced Jerusalem, where Jews had fought against their enemies in 70 C.E. and again in 1948 to the bitter end. But their veneration did not extend to the City of the Patriarchs, whose Orthodox Jews had gone "like sheep to the slaughter" in 1929. To victorious Zionists who had defeated three Arab countries in six days, the Israeli victory was attributable to military power, not divine will or human prayer. Unlike divided Jerusalem, where half the population was Jewish, not a single Jew remained in Hebron. A symbol of the old religious *yishuv* that secular Zionists scorned, Hebron was problematic in ways that Jerusalem was not.

Pursuing a policy of "harmonious coexistence," Dayan quickly countermanded Rabbi Goren's attempts to claim *Me'arat HaMachpelah* for Israel and Judaism. He ordered the Israeli flag lowered and a Torah scroll removed, but he permitted Jewish visitors to wear their shoes inside the Machpelah mosque (unlike in the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem). To ensure that Muslim worshippers were not disturbed, visiting hours for Jews were restricted; no Jewish worship was permitted on Fridays, the Muslim Sabbath. The military rabbinate even agreed to ban Saturday visits so that Jews would not desecrate their Sabbath by driving to Hebron.

When Rabbi Goren extended permission for wedding ceremonies to be held inside *Me'arat HaMachpelah*, Dayan, eager to maintain amicable

relations with Mayor Ja'abari, overruled him. Conceding that Machpelah "was in fact a Jewish holy place," he nonetheless insisted on "compromise and mutual respect." It was, Dayan subsequently wrote, "up to us to show broad tolerance." For the moment, at least, his preference for a policy of accommodation that might lead to Arab-Israeli reconciliation determined the precarious balance between Muslim sensibilities and Jewish claims in Hebron.

But among graduates of the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva, Israel's stunning military victory evoked joyous exultation and eager anticipation. As teenagers in the 1950s, their Orthodoxy had left them with feelings of inferiority toward secular Zionists, whose achievements of settlement and statehood they greatly admired. They had framed their own religious embrace of Zionism in the Bnei Akiva youth movement and a group called *Gahelet*, an acronym for Torah-Learning Pioneers. In the mid-1960s, they organized a faction within the National Religious Party called *Hug Emunim*, the circle of the faithful.

After the week of "splendid revelations" in June 1967, Rabbi Kook became a prophet to his faithful disciples for teaching that redemption meant settlement of the entire Land of Israel. Suddenly and unexpectedly, Jews had been returned to "the formative roots of the Jewish People and the Jewish religion." With their understanding of "the true, redemptive meaning" of Israel's victory, Hebrew University scholar Aviezer Ravitzky wrote perceptively, Rabbi Kook's disciples could link "theology, historical experience, and political activity." A Mercaz HaRav graduate described his education there: "It was not merely study. It led to action. . . . [Rav Kook] always encouraged us to fulfill our responsibilities to the state. It was part of our religious obligation." Their opportunity to "grasp the reins of history" had finally arrived. For two of Rabbi Kook's former students—Hanan Porat and Moshe Levinger—politics and theology, Zionism and Torah, converged after the Six-Day War in ways that would transform Israel.

Porat was a child refugee from Gush Etzion, the cluster of predominantly religious kibbutzim between Jerusalem and Hebron. Located in the hill country where Abraham had pitched his tent, David had been anointed king, and the Maccabees and Bar Kokhba had waged their desperate rebellions, the first Gush Etzion settlement was built in 1943 on the site of a former failed community. It was named Kvutzat Avraham, after the elder Rabbi Kook, whose teachings had inspired its Polish founders. Planting saplings, they recited, "This is the way our forefathers trod; it is our way as pioneers of Torah and labor."

The mystique of settlement "between the Holy City and the City of the Patriarchs" was compelling. The newcomers were soon joined by members of *HaShomer HaDati*, a mixed group of Orthodox settlers from

Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Germany. Two additional settlements followed; by 1947, they were known collectively as Gush Etzion. An isolated Jewish community, it comprised 450 mostly religious Zionists. A solitary Zionist outpost surrounded by hostile Arab villages, it was exceedingly vulnerable. To protect it, religious kibbutzim formed a "Committee for the Promotion of Religious Settlement Between Jerusalem and Hebron." But it was too little, too late.

When the United Nations approved the partition of Palestine in November 1947, the Etzion bloc, vital for the protection of southern approaches to Jerusalem, was among thirty settlements that were removed from the borders of the new Jewish state. Besieged and beleaguered, with every rescue and supply convoy decimated by local Arab marauders, the community evacuated mothers and children, including the Porats, early in 1948 and dug in for its final, doomed resistance. Gush Etzion fighters knew the ancient story of Masada; they had also studied Trumpeldor's heroic defense of Tel Hai just twenty-five years earlier. History bolstered their courage but prepared them for their inevitable defeat and likely death.

When the Arab Legion and swarms of local villagers attacked and overran the settlement, they killed nearly 250 valiant fighters and murdered scores of captured survivors. Bedraggled and wounded prisoners were marched through Hebron on their way to Jordanian captivity. Kfar Etzion, thereafter identified by Israelis with Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac to demonstrate his faith, would become an iconic symbol of heroic resistance and an enduring source of Zionist inspiration. "The flames of Etzion's Akedah burning bright with terror lit up the resurrection of the State." The next day, on May 14, Israel declared its independence. The destruction of Gush Etzion and the creation of a Jewish state were fused in Zionist consciousness. "I do not know of a more glorious, tragic and heroic episode in the whole and heroic war of the Hagana and the Israel Defense Forces than the episode of Gush Etzion," wrote Prime Minister Ben-Gurion. It was, he concluded, "a great and awe-inspiring saga and the glory of the war of the Jews." By Knesset decree, the day of the fall of Gush Etzion became—and remains—the day of remembrance for all Israeli soldiers killed in military action.

The defeat and destruction of Gush Etzion was a tragic memory that was passionately stoked by its survivors. Evacuated at the last moment, Hanan Porat grew up within a cohort of survivors who memorialized the struggle to preserve the doomed settlements. "We felt that we'd been torn away," he remembered. "They cut our roots brutally." Annual pilgrimages to the Mount Herzl cemetery on the Day of Remembrance were invariably followed by a visit to Ramat Rachel, a kibbutz on the southern edge of Jerusalem, to gaze in the distance at the solitary tree that marked

the site of the abandoned community. The "Lone Tree," a survivor explained, remained "a symbol of hope, a symbol of faith, a symbol of the certainty that the day would come when we would return to the place."

Gush Etzion, Foreign Minister Abba Eban subsequently wrote, was commemorated as "a story of valor and sacrifice." Pioneers "steeped in the Jewish faith" had settled in the Hebron hills, where Abraham had "pitched his tent when he entered the Land of Promise by Divine command." There they fought to their deaths for Jewish statehood. Gush Etzion, observes sociologist David Ohana, was transformed into "a microcosm of the land of Israel, Jewish history, and the Zionist revolution." Indeed, Ohana suggests, the most impressive achievement of "the politics of memory" during Israel's first half century was "that of a small group of skullcap-wearers, the sons of Kfar Etzion," whose unrelenting goal was to return and rebuild their vanquished community. As one of the fighters declared, "I felt that it was forbidden to us, from the historical point of view, to allow a Jewish settlement, and especially Kfar Etzion, to be wiped off the map." Driven by the power of memory, they were determined to return and rebuild their destroyed community.

The Gush Etzion survivors waited nineteen years to convert their memories and dreams into Zionist reality. Then they transformed a historical disaster into an opportunity for return. Immediately after the Six-Day War ended, Porat began to lobby government officials for the restoration of his boyhood home. News of his efforts reached Moshe Levinger, a rabbi at Nehalim, an Orthodox moshav near Petah Tikva. Born in Jerusalem in 1935, two years after his parents arrived in Palestine from Germany, Levinger had attended a Bnei Akiva yeshiva, served in the army, and studied at Rabbi Kook's Mercaz HaRav. Then he joined kibbutz Lavi, near the Golan Heights, where he combined rabbinical duties with shepherding. His time there deepened his appreciation for the Labor Zionist settlement movement that had populated the northern Galilee with kibbutzim.

After meeting in Jerusalem, Porat and Levinger enlarged their nascent group to include Elyakim Haetzni, a secular Israeli lawyer who had arrived in Palestine from Germany at the age of twelve in 1938. Severely wounded in the War of Independence, he survived lengthy hospitalization to become a maverick attorney, assisting new immigrants and fighting government corruption. Haetzni, like Rabbi Kook, had declined to celebrate Israeli independence because, he explained, "we gained a state but lost the Land of Israel." Experiencing the Six-Day War as "a miraculous victory," he decided, "I must go to Hebron." For Jews, "nationality and religion are one . . . inseparable." And Hebron, after all, was "part of our genetic code." There must be "a Jewish vengeance of building, rebirth and return."

Haetzni approached Rabbi Yehezkel Sarna of the Slobodka yeshiva, which had relocated to Jerusalem after the massacre in 1929, to gauge his interest in returning his yeshiva to Hebron. The rabbi had already met with Ben-Gurion to discuss that possibility. The elder statesman had responded, “*Nu, nu*, we must return immediately.” But nothing came of it. Few of Haetzni’s secular friends in Tel Aviv shared his passion for Hebron. Then he encountered Levinger and Porat.

Their small group began to meet in Haetzni’s law office or at the Exodus café in North Tel Aviv to plan their strategy for the return of Jews to Hebron. They sought government approval, but their efforts were rebuffed. Neither Prime Minister Eshkol nor Defense Minister Dayan would meet with them. They placed a newspaper advertisement seeking recruits for the resettlement of abandoned Jewish communities: “Wanted: families or singles to resettle ancient city of Hebron.” The response was, at best, tepid.

Gush Etzion came first. Its impeccable Zionist credentials and its courageous battle for survival during the war for national independence contrasted sharply with the political passivity of Hebron Jews in 1929. The Hebron trauma had shattered the community, leaving most of its survivors unable to imagine their return. Gush Etzion was different. Its tragic ordeal in 1948 had kindled the flame of memory among the survivors, who were embraced by Israelis and absorbed within the national narrative of heroic Zionist struggle.

With the tacit approval of Prime Minister Eshkol, the Gush Etzion activists made their move three months after the war ended (over the objections of several widows who did not want to place their children at risk where their fathers had suffered tragic, if heroic, deaths). Just before Rosh Hashanah, a long convoy of cars, led by an armored bus from the 1948 exodus, returned to Kfar Etzion. Government ministers joined them. According to *Maariv*, these were “children coming again to their borders,” precisely as Jeremiah had prophesied in the seventh century B.C.E.

To Porat, who returned to live on the site of his abandoned family home, Gush Etzion was only the beginning of something much larger, “the spearhead of the struggle for the Greater Land of Israel.” When Ben-Gurion visited the newly restored settlement, he pointed to the surrounding open spaces and declared that Hebron, too, “must be settled by Jews, many Jews. It used to be a Jewish city and a large Jewish settlement must be reestablished.”

Rabbi Levinger, accompanied by Avraham Franco, an elderly survivor of the 1929 massacre, visited Hebron to determine whether any opportunity existed to buy or rent property that was still owned by Jews. In the desecrated Jewish cemetery, where cabbage grew over the grave of Franco’s father, Levinger experienced “an awakening of tempestuous

spirits." The visit, he recalled, created "an internal turmoil that left me restless for days and weeks." He decided to return to Hebron and restore a Jewish community there. The circle of prospective settlers slowly expanded. Levinger and Porat already knew each other from Mercaz HaRav and Moshav Nehalim. Early in the spring of 1968, Levinger, joined by a group of soldiers who had fought in the war—including future settlement leaders Benny Katzover, Rabbi Haim Druckman, and Rabbi Eliezer Waldman—contacted the military governor of Hebron. They requested permission to hold a Passover Seder in the town and spend the night.

In recognition of the historic Jewish presence in Hebron, Labor Minister Yigal Allon had already floated a proposal for a Jewish neighborhood nearby, perhaps an "upper" Hebron on a hill overlooking the Arab city (like Upper Nazareth, built in the Galilee in 1958). Learning of his suggestion, the Levinger group proposed that two dozen families and some young single men be permitted to establish a yeshiva there. The government did not respond. Miriam Levinger, the daughter of Hasidic immigrant parents from Hungary who grew up in the east Bronx and came to Jerusalem to train as a nurse, told her husband, "The government won't send you there. Go settle, and things will work out." At a meeting several weeks before Passover, the decision was made to move into Hebron without government permission. "If the government doesn't bless us now," said one participant, "we will settle Hebron and we will merit the government's decision afterward."

Frustrated by government indecision and inaction, Rabbi Levinger negotiated a rental arrangement with the owner of the Park Hotel for Passover week in April 1968. The hotel, a nondescript two-story stone building, had fallen on hard times, losing nearly its entire clientele after the war once prosperous Jordanians no longer vacationed there. Posing as Swiss tourists, the Levinger group negotiated a rental agreement for one dollar nightly for each guest. The hotel owner assured Levinger that they could extend their stay if they wished. Levinger left a substantial deposit for "an unlimited amount of people for an unspecified period of time." Some Israeli government authorities learned of the plan, but they did not interfere. Central Command General Uzi Narkiss told Levinger, "What do you want? To settle in Hebron? I don't care. I know nothing. Rent a hotel, put up tents. . . . I know nothing."

A sizable group of Israelis—estimates range between sixty and eighty—arrived in Hebron on April 12 to celebrate Passover and restore a Jewish presence in the city. The Levingers, clearly intending to stay, brought their four children, a refrigerator, and a washing machine. The kitchen was made kosher, and mezzuzas were attached to door frames. Rabbi Levinger recalled, "We never told anyone that we were going only to celebrate Passover. The government authorities knew that we wanted to

settle." Rabbi Chaim Druckman, another graduate of the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva, led the Seder. Hanan Porat attended, as did Rabbi Eliezer Waldman (who had been considered by some Gush Etzion settlers to be too old, at thirty-two, for rebuilding their community). Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, a recent immigrant from France who would lead Ateret Cohanim, the movement to restore a Jewish presence throughout Jerusalem's Old City, joined the celebration, along with veteran Irgun fighter Shmuel Katz, *Maariv* journalist Yisrael Harel, and math student Benny Katzover.

After the festive meal, exulting participants, joined by a Druze soldier who was guarding the hotel, danced and sang *v'shavu banim l'goulam* ("your children shall return to their borders"). Elyakim Haetzni, accompanied by his wife, mother, and four children, still glowed nearly forty years later when he described the Seder as "a once in a lifetime experience." Miriam Levinger sensed "an historical breakthrough, and we all felt deeply moved and excited."

The next morning the celebrants, singing and dancing through the streets of Hebron, carried Torah scrolls to *Me'arat HaMachpelah*. That evening, after the end of the Jewish Sabbath, some of the older participants left the hotel to return to their homes, but younger Israelis and yeshiva students remained behind, soon to be joined by enthusiastic newcomers. The next day, in their exuberance, they sent a telegram to Labor Minister Allon:

BLESSINGS FOR FESTIVAL OF OUR FREEDOM TO YOU FROM HEBRON
CITY OF PATRIARCHS FROM FIRST OF THOSE RETURNING TO IT TO
SETTLE IN IT IN THE NAME OF 30 FAMILIES RABBI MOSHE LEVINGER

Their presence in Hebron and their evident determination to remain caught the government by surprise at a difficult moment. Defense Minister Dayan had just been hospitalized with serious injuries suffered when the tunnel of a Philistine mound collapsed while he was digging for ancient artifacts. (When asked what he was digging for, Dayan replied, "The ancient Land of Israel. Everything that Israel was.") Foreign Minister Eban was opposed to resettlement. But Labor Minister Allon came to visit the Hebron settlers and agreed to have weapons sent from Gush Etzion—"just in case, God forbid, there should be fighting." (Porat had suggested submachine guns and hand grenades.) Religious Affairs Minister Zorach Warhaftig, a signer of the Proclamation of Independence twenty years earlier, arrived the next day. Menachem Begin, leader of the opposition Herut Party, praised the new settlers.

Not all Israelis were similarly pleased. Soon after the war ended, a group of intellectuals and academics, including writer A. B. Yehoshua and historian Saul Friedlander, published a statement titled "Security

and Peace, Yes; Annexation, No!" But even the Labor Zionist newspaper *Haaretz*, which described Hebron as "a quiet, obedient city," envisioned a benign future for settlers that would include diamond-polishing workshops, a kosher restaurant or hotel, and a souvenir factory.

From his desert home in Sde Boker, Ben-Gurion offered support: "We will make a great and awful mistake if we fail to settle Hebron, neighbor and predecessor of Jerusalem, with a large Jewish settlement, constantly growing and expanding There is no redemption without extensive Jewish settlement." The land between Jerusalem and Hebron, after all, was considered to be "the cradle of the Jewish people." But Prime Minister Eshkol declined to decide. Other ministers equivocated. The judge advocate general of the army issued an order permitting the settlers to remain but prohibiting any newcomers from joining them—in effect, "neither to help nor hinder them." A temporary stalemate held, while a divided government struggled with the vexing issue of Jews once again living in Hebron.

In the interim, Mayor Ja'bari had written to Eshkol, ostensibly to convey his concern for the settlers' safety. He expressed the hope that some day Jews would indeed return to their homes in Hebron—once Palestinian Arabs could return to homes in Israel that they had abandoned in 1948. After Passover, Ja'bari invited members of the Park Hotel group to his office. Welcoming them as tourists, the mayor treated them as temporary guests at the hotel. But Rabbi Levinger believed that the mayor had accepted the reality of renewed settlement in Hebron. Each came away from the meeting hearing what he wanted to hear.

The boldness and tenacity of the new settlers had gained them a foothold in Hebron that they were determined to retain. After nearly six weeks, a ministerial committee finally authorized Dayan to relocate the Park Hotel group to Israeli military headquarters, a sprawling building overlooking the city that had previously served the British and Jordanians. The settlers also received permission to establish a yeshiva there. Dayan, satisfied with their removal from the heart of Hebron to a nearby barren hill, may have anticipated that the spartan accommodations would dim their enthusiasm. Tacit recognition of the group might even enhance government control over the new settlers. If some settlers believed that their relocation conferred *de facto* recognition, others who suspected that Dayan was inclined to strangle their settlement project were more likely correct.

But Rabbi Levinger fervently asserted "the responsibility of the Jewish people to live in the land that God had given to them." Even the secular lawyer Haetzni, who had his differences with Levinger, felt a "compulsion" about Hebron: "Our identity has to do with a historical link to people and places of the past." If Jews could return to Jerusalem's Old

City and to Gush Etzion, why not to Hebron? There, he realized, "I am at home, in the bosom of Abraham."

Life inside the military compound was not easy. Each family, regardless of size, received one small room in a two-room apartment. Fourteen unmarried young women shared a room; male yeshiva students lived together in another room. Meals, kibbutz style, were communal. An adjacent courtyard was used for hanging wash to dry and for children's games. Rabbi Levinger donated his library to the yeshiva. A kitchen cupboard served as the ark. One of the Torah scrolls, loaned by his brother, was 400 years old. To hide it from the Nazis, Jews had sewn it inside oil-skin and immersed it in the Rhine River for the duration of the war. The other scroll, rescued from Hebron in 1929, symbolized continuity between the two communities. The Torah scrolls conveyed a clear message: we have survived tragedy; we have returned, this time to stay.

The new settlers, citing their "deep historical tie to the city of our fathers" and Hebron's history as "a center of murderous activity" against Jews, probed for opportunities to enlarge and expand their presence. After two months, the military government built prefabricated housing for them inside the police compound. Yeshiva students received resident permits, and the government permitted newcomers to join the group. In August, settlers set up a kiosk near Machpelah to serve drinks and kosher food. They hung a sign reading "Settlers of Hebron." But the military ordered the kiosk dismantled, the settlers protested, and the issue went to the Israeli Cabinet for resolution. Dayan would not permit "settlement by kiosk," but, contemplating Allon's idea, he consulted with other ministers about the possibility of building an "urban suburb" to provide permanent housing overlooking the city for the persistent settlers.

Even as the irrepressible Dayan resisted Jewish settlement in Hebron, he was intrigued by the hidden secrets that might be revealed inside the Cave of Machpelah. Never one to miss an opportunity to excavate ancient sites, he searched for a way to open a sealed chamber beneath the mosque as a separate entrance for Jewish worshippers. He decided to lower "a bright and courageous little girl," the twelve-year-old daughter of an Israeli security officer, through a narrow opening in the floor of the mosque to explore the underground labyrinth. Michal Arbal, asked by her mother whether she would enter "a small hole leading into a cave," consented, learning only then that the cave was Machpelah. A few hours later, her father awakened her, wrapped her in a blanket—"I must have looked like a bundle dumped on the backseat," she recalled—and drove to Hebron.

In a report of her nocturnal exploration, she wrote, "Ropes were tied around me, I was given a torch [flashlight] and matches (to test the air below) and I was lowered. I landed on a heap of papers and money bills." Finding herself in a square room with an opening in one wall, she entered

into "a low, narrow corridor whose walls were cut out of the rock. . . . At the end of the corridor was a stairwell and the steps ended in a built wall." She faced a stone slab, inscribed with a passage from the Koran, that blocked further passage. Pulled back up, she described what she had seen and was lowered again with additional instructions. Measuring the corridor—"thirty-four paces long"—she counted the steps—"fifteen when I went up but sixteen when I went down." Returning for a camera, she photographed "the square room, the tombstones, the corridor, and the staircase." Supplied with a pencil and paper, she took careful measurements and drew sketches. Pulled back up, she dropped her light, "so I went down for it and was drawn up again." Michal was the first Jew in 700 years to explore the subterranean passages of Machpelah.

Not long after her underground adventure, thousands of Israelis gathered in Hebron to celebrate Sukkoth. As a lengthy line of visitors awaited entry to Machpelah, a local Arab teenager who belonged to a terrorist cell that had recently carried out attacks in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv threw a grenade in their midst. Forty-seven Israelis, including a number of children, were injured. The Hebron settlers became increasingly vocal in their criticism of government "indulgence" of local Arabs. Since "enough Jewish blood has already been spilled in Hebron," they "expected and believed" that the army would reconsider its "lenient" policies. Dayan's "good-neighbor" policy and the government's "wait-and-see" approach to the possibility for peace with neighboring Arab states were becoming severely strained.

The claims of the Hebron settlers were eventually recognized, if haltingly, by the government. In the spring of 1969, two apartment blocks were built inside the military compound to house a dozen families. Dormitories were constructed for yeshiva students, and the old British stables were converted into a study hall. The community of nearly 150 settlers continued to press for a more permanent site. A proclamation was sent to the government declaring that more than 100 families were ready to move to Hebron with investors prepared to support them. Finally, early in 1970, Yigal Allon, now deputy prime minister, announced plans to build an "upper Hebron," to be called Kiryat Arba (the name of biblical Hebron), on a hill overlooking the city. In March, the Knesset ratified the Cabinet decision, marking the first step toward official government recognition of a permanent settlement. Kiryat Arba was a compromise—a temporary substitute for Hebron—but, for the moment, the settlers accepted it.

Government ministers, journalist Gershom Gorenberg writes, were swayed "by ancient and recent history—by the biblical power of the city's name and by [the settlers'] consistent impulse to return to places from which Jews had been pushed out in their own memory." Measured against Zionist history, the Kiryat Arba proposal was hardly novel. Zion-

ism had always meant the return to Zion, settling the land “dunam by dunam,” as *halutzim* had done during the prestate years. The historically revered Zionist precedent—near mythical “tower and stockade” settlements of the 1930s, many of which had also been built in proximity to the local Arab population—remained a vivid memory. Indeed, during Israel’s war for independence, nearly 200 new Jewish settlements were built on confiscated Arab land, including the sites of former Arab villages. As historian Benny Morris has written about that episode, settlement was “the means by which the Land of Israel would be ‘redeemed’ from its centuries-old desolation and usurpation by foreigners.”

After two years of ambivalence and hesitation, government ministers had finally decided to decide. In March 1970, the Knesset approved their decision by an overwhelming majority. The unrelenting determination of the Hebron settlers proved decisive. Comprising a community of memory that fused the biblical narrative of Machpelah and the massacre of 1929 to the renewal of Zionist settlement throughout the Land of Israel, they had taken the first steps to heal the deep wound of Tarpat. The new settlement of Kiryat Arba was built on a twenty-two-acre tract overlooking Hebron on an empty hill that had already been seized by Israeli military authorities, with nominal compensation to its Arab owners, “for military purposes.”

Rabbi Levinger had proven to be a formidable, indeed irrepressible, leader—and provocateur. Occasionally histrionic, even hysterical, his charismatic power was indisputable. Combining asceticism, stubbornness, and courage, he led by bold example. (Journalist Nahum Barnea called him a “dervish”; to political scientist Ehud Sprinzak, he “looks like a tormented biblical prophet and lives like a monk.”) Levinger was unafraid to roam, at night and unarmed, through the forbidding Arab casbah. There, oblivious to danger, he might sit on the ground, lead prayers, and conduct a Torah lesson. “Gaunt, careless of his appearance,” a visitor wrote, “he seemed unconcerned about anything but his mission to settle the Land of Israel.”

Levinger unequivocally located the Hebron settlers within the Zionist mainstream: “Like emigrants and settlers at the turn of the century, . . . and the kibbutz farmers, we, too, are pioneers.” To the passionate Zionist rabbi, settlement was “a basic principle of Jewish existence and a moral foundation of this state.” It was, he insisted, so fundamental that “even a majority cannot vote [it] away.”

In 1971, the first residents moved into Kiryat Arba, a ten-minute downhill walk to Machpelah and the center of Hebron. The newcomers were impelled by the familiar, indeed fundamental, Zionist precept: settlement of the land. In historical reality, however, Zionism had meant the return of Jews to the coastal plain of Palestine, much of it the land of the ancient

Philistines, not to the hill country of Judea and Samaria, where biblical and early Israelite history had unfolded. But the new generation of religious Zionists, coming of age with the Six-Day War, insisted on Zionist settlement throughout the ancient Jewish homeland.

Not even Moshe Dayan could stand in their way. A decade after the Six-Day War, the former defense minister told an interviewer that he had opposed “this wild settlement” in Hebron. “I understood its significance, that it was a catastrophe,” he continued, and he regretted his inability to prevent Rabbi Levinger’s “pirate settlement.” Belatedly, he realized that he should have threatened to resign in protest. Dayan’s impassioned postwar pledge—“We will not be parted from the holy places”—had been forgotten.

The establishment of Kiryat Arba represented “an uneasy compromise between security, demography, emotion, and history.” Adjacent to Hebron but outside the city, it marked an ambivalent statement of government support for the new settlers. Eager to trade newly acquired land for genuine peace with their Arab neighbors, the Labor government had instead encountered unrelenting Arab intransigence, climaxed by the three “no’s” of thirteen Arab states at the postwar Khartoum Conference: no peace with Israel, no negotiation with Israel, and no recognition of Israel. So the Israeli government had decided to “create facts,” with gradual, limited settlement on the Golan Heights, in the Jordan Valley, in Gush Etzion, and now adjacent to Hebron. Mayor Ja’bari might protest (with inflamed rhetoric) that Kiryat Arba “contradicts every moral and international law and code,” but settlement would proceed while Israel awaited signs that Arab hostility to the very existence of a Jewish state had finally receded.

Kiryat Arba was planned as a small town, with 1,000 dwelling units. The first fifty families, most of them veterans of the military compound, moved into their new homes just before Rosh Hashanah in 1971. Their isolated hilltop settlement grew slowly as a satellite of Hebron. After five years, the population had reached nearly 1,500, including 140 yeshiva students, but nearly half the available apartments remained vacant. Some residents found employment in Kiryat Arba municipal departments, yeshivas, and small local businesses. Others commuted to Jerusalem. Benny Katzover and Menachem Felix, among the first residents, left to build settlements in Samaria. It was not an easy life, but for many of its inhabitants it was only a first step.

Kiryat Arba resembled other Israeli development towns, remote from main population centers and economically disadvantaged. It was a more heterogeneous community than was often apparent to hostile outsiders. Subsequently maligned as little more than a nest of Brooklyn zealots inspired by Rabbi Meir Kahane, its original nucleus of religious Zionists tended to obscure its subsequent diversity. In time, nearly half its popu-

lation was not Orthodox; almost half were descended from families that had immigrated to Israel from Arab countries, especially in North Africa. In addition to the small American cohort, there was a significant presence of new immigrants from the Soviet Union and, by the early 1980s, several hundred newcomers from Ethiopia.

Kiryat Arba was intended as the beginning, not the culmination, of Hebron settlement. The determination to return to Hebron, to rebuild the destroyed Jewish neighborhood adjacent to Machpelah, did not subside. Biding their time, Kiryat Arba settlers initially concentrated their efforts on establishing parity in prayer with Muslims in the mosque above the burial caves. The *waqf*, unaccustomed to sharing space, was required by the Israeli government to accommodate Jewish visitors.

Over Muslim protests, Jews were permitted to hold a religious service inside the mosque for the first time in 1968 for Yom Kippur. In 1971, the Israeli government granted permission for a portable ark to be used during times of Jewish prayer. Then the ark was permanently located in the Abraham Hall, the smallest of the three patriarchal chambers. Several years later, the Jacob Hall and the courtyard between them were also opened to Jewish prayer. After sustained pressure, the settlers secured permission to use the space, once Muslim prayer had concluded, for Friday evening services. But wine, forbidden to Muslims, was still prohibited from the premises, even for the traditional *kiddush* at the conclusion of the *Shabbat* service. Not until 1979, after a group of Kiryat Arba settlers forced their way into Isaac Hall, the largest and most attractive prayer space in the mosque, did the Israeli government authorize Jewish religious services there, subject to certain restrictions.

A study sponsored by the West Bank Data Project subsequently concluded that "gains for Jewish worshippers could be achieved only at the expense of Muslims." Muslims, after all, had excluded Jews (and Christians) from Machpelah for seven centuries; they were accustomed to the privileges of exclusivity and bitterly resentful of sharing space. For the settlers, however, even equal rights seemed like their own concession. As lawyer Haetzni asserted, "If having been somewhere *before* is an argument, then we have a super-argument, because we were here *before* the before."

The conflict between Muslim claims of exclusivity and Jewish demands for access was resolved by pressure from settlers and decisions by an ambivalent Labor government, ever more deeply divided over settlement issues. The Israeli army struggled to appear as a neutral arbiter, trying to implement a policy that ensured "religious pluralism." Predictably, the Muslim community was outraged. As Jewish settlers pressed the issue, it became impossible to protect the rights of one group without impinging on the claims of the other.

Over time, a partition policy evolved that sustained an uneasy equilibrium. Times of worship and routes of access were allocated, according to government policy, "so that everyone can pray to his God and visit the tombs of his saints with mutual respect and without any disturbance." That satisfied no one. To Muslims, any change in the old status quo was intolerable. To Kiryat Arba residents, prayer time alone was insufficient; they pressed for inclusion of the traditional life cycle religious ceremonies that were normally conducted in a synagogue: *bris* (circumcision), *bar mitzvah*, and marriage.

Among them were Baruch and Sarah Nachshon, who had been living in Jerusalem when the Six-Day War began. In memory of Baruch's friend, killed in the fighting, they decided to "do something." Baruch, a talented artist, suggested moving to Hebron, but Sarah hesitated. Visiting Hebron after the Park Hotel Seder, she was told by a government official that the presence of Jews in Hebron was "a bone in our throat." She promptly decided that they must live there. With their four children, they moved into one room at the military compound, where they remained for three years. After the birth of their first son, a joyous occasion for the entire community, they wanted to hold his *bris* in the Machpelah enclosure. But the Muslim prohibition on wine in a mosque, which the Israeli army enforced, prevented it.

When another son, Avraham Yedidia, was born, his *bris* was held secretly in Machpelah. In the middle of the ceremony, Israeli police arrived and arrested Baruch. But the judge dismissed the case because the police, delighted by their discovery of wine, had not only confiscated the evidence but also imbibed it. Then, at the age of six months, the Nachshon baby suddenly suffered crib death. His parents decided to bury him in the old Jewish cemetery in Hebron, where no Jew had been buried since 1929. Israeli government officials, eager not to further provoke Hebron Arabs, refused permission. They told Sarah to choose a cemetery in Jerusalem or Kiryat Arba. She adamantly insisted on Hebron.

On the day of the funeral, Israeli soldiers blocked the road to the Hebron cemetery. After more than an hour of waiting, Sarah Nachshon wearied of the impasse. She told the soldiers, "You have your orders. I have mine." Returning to her car, she cradled her dead son in her arms and began to walk past the military blockade. Accompanied by women from Kiryat Arba and men with shovels and flashlights, she walked through Hebron toward the cemetery. Soldiers frantically telephoned their superior officers, who in turn called the Ministry of Defense, for instructions. During the impasse several soldiers, moved by a grieving mother's unyielding determination, volunteered to drive her in a military vehicle.

At the grave site in the old Jewish cemetery, Sarah Nachshon said, "God gave us our son for one reason. He had a job to do in his short

life—to open our ancient graveyard. This he has accomplished and God has taken him back. We are very privileged.” She continued,

Avraham Yedidia, you closed a circle in history: Avraham our patriarch purchased for his children the first property in the Holy Land when he bought the field of Machpelah with his money and buried his wife Sarah there, and now the circle has been closed, with Sarah burying Avraham.

The Nachshon baby was buried a few meters from the common grave of the Tarpot victims. After the funeral, Sarah Nachshon said, “If we open the Jewish cemetery, we open the gates to the city.”

The burial of Abraham Yedidia Nachshon linked past and present, death and life, in Hebron. Sarah Nachshon had symbolically reclaimed Hebron for the new community of Jewish settlers while reconnecting them to their martyred predecessors. “The new Place,” anthropologist Michael Feige observes, “contains within itself the old Place.” As the biblical Nachshon had been the first Israelite to enter the Red Sea after the Exodus from Egypt, so the Nachshon baby, the first Jew to be circumcised in Machpelah, became the first Jew to be buried in Hebron in forty years.

In the preface to *Sefer Hebron*, a commemorative volume published in 1970, David Ben-Gurion wrote, “We would be guilty of the most fearsome error if we failed to establish a large and growing Jewish settlement in the shortest possible time in Hebron.” Galvanized by the Six-Day War, a small group of religious Zionists came to Hebron to obliterate the tragic legacy of 1929 and rebuild the martyred community. The burial of Abraham Yedidiya Nachshon in the ancient Jewish cemetery was another harbinger of return.

6



Renewal

Even Hebron, the revered City of the Patriarchs, could not compare to Jerusalem as the timeless focus of Jewish prayer, yearning, and lamentation. Jews did not recite “Next year in Hebron” to express their longing to return, nor did they pledge “If I forget thee, O Hebron” or pray “for the peace of Hebron” as they did for Jerusalem. Indeed, after the horror of 1929, Hebron faded from Zionist memory. To most Israelis in 1967, it was nothing more than an insular, hostile Arab town with a tragic Jewish past. The planned restoration of the Jewish Quarter of the Old City in Jerusalem, and the construction of the Western Wall plaza as a national civic site, were not emulated or even seriously contemplated for Hebron and *Me’arat HaMachpelah*.

But the Six-Day War had propelled Hebron to the crossroads of Zionist identity. Suddenly, unexpectedly, Zionism and Judaism had converged. For graduates of Rabbi Kook’s Mercaz HaRav yeshiva, “the State of Israel became the Land of Israel and the Zionist state the Jewish state.” The biblical injunction to conquer and settle the land once again became a Zionist call to action. To be sure, secular Zionists had always embraced, at least rhetorically, the theme of continuity—whether historical or mythological—between modern and ancient Israel. But virtually from the moment that the Israel Defense Forces arrived in Hebron, when Moshe Dayan ordered the removal of Rabbi Goren’s Israeli flag from Machpelah, disagreement began to simmer over the ultimate sources of identity and legitimacy in the State of Israel. Ever since, Hebron has remained the flashpoint of acrimonious struggle between secular and religious Zionists that has yet to be resolved and seems likely only to intensify.

Too deeply embedded in Jewish history to ignore, Hebron was too alien for secular Israelis to comfortably embrace. What to do about the most ancient Jewish holy site in the midst of a sullen if not actively hostile Arab town whose Muslims identified Hebron as al-Khalil and exclusively theirs was not immediately apparent. What was so easily done in Jerusalem in those heady June days of 1967—destroying an Arab neighborhood and expelling its residents to facilitate access to the Western Wall—would not be attempted in Hebron. For the sake of the peace that did not come, in recognition of the exclusively Arab population in Hebron and the sanctity of the *Haram* enclosure to Muslims, and from secular Zionist discomfort with religious nationalism, the Israeli government held back.

Kiryat Arba was a temporary compromise, not a permanent solution. Its Jewish residents bided their time, awaiting an opportunity to return to Hebron in the name of the destroyed community of 1929. As Dayan's "good-neighbor" policy was undermined by episodes of Palestinian terrorism, the position of the government on the return of territories slowly hardened. When Golda Meir became prime minister in 1969, she resisted open debate on the future of Israel's new territories as "undesirable and harmful." The new government, like its predecessor, preferred to wait and see whether Arab states would agree to recognize Israel and live in peace with it before irrevocable decisions were made about contested land.

But the government had Rabbi Levinger, the intrepid leader of the Kiryat Arba settlers, to contend with. He seemed untroubled by the nascent conflict that his settlement strategy might pose between loyalty to Torah and loyalty to the government of Israel. Indeed, he threw down the gauntlet of legitimacy when he declared, "The Jewish national renaissance is more important than democracy. . . . The fate of *Eretz Yisrael* and a free and whole Jewish life in it are not subject to a majority vote. . . . No government has the authority or right to say that a Jew cannot live in all of the parts of the Land of Israel." With characteristic bluntness, he rejected any compromise over land "that belongs not only to us but also to God." Levinger could never persuade the Israeli majority, nor did he ever relinquish his passionate faith or moderate his determination to demonstrate it through action.

In the interim, before any decision whether Jews could once again live in Hebron, incremental steps were possible. Their right to pray inside Machpelah was secured. The vital requirements of a synagogue—an *aron* (ark) and Torah scroll—were introduced. Deeply moved by Sarah Nachshon's eulogy for her baby son, Benzion Tavger, a former Soviet prisoner of Zion who had moved from Novosibirsk to Kiryat Arba, volunteered to guard the cemetery—and to search for old graves and boundaries. When he learned from local Arabs that the site of the Avraham Avinu synagogue had become a goat pen, he went there to dig in its ruins for

remnants of the martyred community. So it went: first Machpelah, then the old cemetery, then the old synagogue. Guided by the memory of what had once been, Kiryat Arba settlers anticipated what would be again—a restored Jewish community in Hebron.

The surprise Egyptian and Syrian attack on Yom Kippur in 1973, which caught the Israeli government completely unprepared, was devastating for the Jewish state. Illusions of national invulnerability were shattered; the debilitating weaknesses of the ruling Labor Party were exposed. Israelis engaged in deep soul-searching about the future of their nation and severely dimmed prospects for peace.

Amid postwar malaise and the national introspection that accompanied it emerged a new organization, Gush Emunim—the bloc of the faithful, a bold attempt to realign and revitalize Israeli politics and culture. It was the response of a small but highly motivated group of religious Zionists—with Rabbi Kook's disciples conspicuous among its leaders—to the rigidity of traditional Orthodox Judaism, without nationalist commitment, and to the shallowness of secular Zionism, largely devoid of Jewish content. By the 1970s, the momentous historic achievements of the Zionist movement—settlement of the land, establishment of the state, and the ingathering of exiles—belonged to the past. And the opportunity created by the Six-Day War for “a new geopolitical reality,” a Jewish state restored to the boundaries of its ancient biblical homeland, was slipping away.

The founding convention of Gush Emunim was held in Gush Etzion early in 1974. Veterans of the Park Hotel Seder, including Rabbis Porat, Levinger, Waldman, and Druckman, emerged as leaders of the new movement. “Given the miraculous liberation of the very heart of the Holy Land,” Gush activists believed that it was “the sacred duty of every Jew to inhabit and repossess every portion of the ancestral inheritance.” The messianic process of redemption, ignited by the Zionist movement, still awaited completion. To realize the Zionist dream, Israel must fulfill its biblical destiny.

Gush Emunim offered a sharp critique of the impulse for Jewish normalization that had come to characterize mainstream Zionism. Its purpose, according to Porat (who authored its founding manifesto), was to encourage “a great awakening of the Jewish people towards full implementation of the Zionist vision.” Gush Emunim was committed to “restoring the pioneering and sacrificial spirit of the past.” Convinced that “there is no Zionism without Judaism, and no Judaism without Zionism,” it resonated with Rabbi Kook's insistence on the sacred obligation of Jews to preserve the integrity of the ancient homeland.

Gush Emunim drew on ideals of national sovereignty, military power, and religious vitality that evoked King David and the Maccabees. The biblical Land of Israel—from Hebron to Shechem—defined the boundaries of

"sacred Jewish geography." God had told Abraham, "Lift up now your eyes . . . for all the land which you see, to you I will give it, and to your seed forever." God said to Moses, "You shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell in it: for I have given you the land to possess it." And God commanded Joshua, "Go to the land which I do give to them, to the children of Israel." Gush Emunim activists were determined to remember what most Israelis had never learned or preferred to forget.

Young religious Zionists lamented "a process of decline and retreat from realization of the Zionist ideal." To combat the "mental weariness and frustration" among Israelis, with their preference "for selfish goals over national objectives," they called for settlement "throughout the Land of Israel." Gush Emunim bitterly castigated government opposition to settlement for replicating the despised restrictive policy of the British Mandatory government during prestate years. Its rhetoric struck a chord of Zionist memory for the bygone pioneering days. As a veteran kibbutznik conceded, "Gush Emunim personified what we once were."

But the Labor government, politically exhausted and internally divided after holding power since 1948, declined to authorize further settlement. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin stated bluntly that he did not care if Israelis needed a Jordanian visa to visit Hebron. But the government was too fractured to respond effectively to the new challenge from Gush Emunim. By 1975, with Kiryat Arba as the model, Elon Moreh (established after seven unsuccessful attempts), Shiloh, Ofra, and Kedumim had sprouted in Samaria, north of Jerusalem. Two years later, the stunning election victory of Menachem Begin, the fiery Irgun leader during the struggle for statehood and an impassioned critic of successive Labor governments ever since independence, transformed Israeli politics.

Soon after his election, Begin visited Rabbi Kook in his Jerusalem home. The new prime minister bowed as a gesture of respect that was fraught with political undertones. "I felt that my heart was bursting within me," said one of Rabbi Kook's students who witnessed the encounter. "What greater empirical proof could there be that [Rabbi Kook's] fantasies and imaginings were indeed reality? . . . People looked upon him as something holy." Begin also made a point of visiting Elon Moreh, where two years of unrelenting effort to open Samaria to settlement had finally succeeded. Holding a Torah scroll as he stood between Rabbi Levinger and Agriculture Minister Ariel Sharon, Begin declared dramatically that there would be "many more Elon Morehs."

Yet even the Begin government resisted the resettlement of Jews in the heart of Hebron. Despite Levinger's fiery insistence that "no government has the authority or right to say that a Jew cannot live in all parts of the Land of Israel," the time was not right, the issue was too sensitive, or there were security problems, budgetary constraints, or American pres-

tures to consider. Relations between the government and Gush Emunim were characterized by what Gideon Aran has called "mutual ambivalence." The government's commitment to settlement, Aran noted, was balanced by "its commitment to law and order, democracy, and the peace process." It both encouraged and admonished settler activists who, in turn, provoked the government even as they sought support from sympathetic ministers.

Although the Begin government, at least in principle, seemed to favor the expansion of Kiryat Arba until it reached the size of Hebron, thereby creating separate Jewish and Arab cities, exploratory discussions between residents and Defense Minister Ezer Weizmann went nowhere. Then, in 1978, the government stunned settlers when it signed the Camp David accords with Egypt, committing it to return the entire Sinai Peninsula and grant "autonomy" to West Bank Palestinians. With opportunities for further settlement slipping from their grasp, Kiryat Arba activists were galvanized.

In 1979, fifty years after the Tarpat massacre, Kiryat Arba residents, frustrated by months of futile negotiation with Weizmann, decided that the time had come to return to Hebron. By community decision, the issue would be forced by women and children, who were least likely to provoke a harsh response from the government or military. One week after Passover, at 4:00 A.M., ten women led by Miriam Levinger and Sarah Nachshon and thirty-five children, eight of whom were Nachshons, arrived by truck at the rear of Beit Hadassah, the former medical clinic in the heart of Hebron. Assisted by teenage boys from Kiryat Arba, they quietly climbed ladders, cut wires to the windows, and unloaded mattresses, cooking burners, gas canisters, water, a refrigerator, laundry lines, and a chemical toilet.

Safely inside the dilapidated building, the excited children began to sing *v'shavu banim l'goulam*, God's promise that the children of Israel would return to Zion. Hearing their enthusiastic voices, an astonished Israeli soldier came down from his observation post on a nearby roof to investigate. When he inquired how they had entered the building, a four-year-old girl instantly responded, "Jacob, our forefather, built us a ladder and we came in."

In their first message from Beit Hadassah the women declared, "When we went to live eight years ago in Kiryat-Arba . . . it was because of compromise and going towards the government. Our wish was and still is Jewish settlement within Hebron." Miriam Levinger, announcing that she was fulfilling a mission for her family members who were murdered in Auschwitz, was more blunt: "Hebron will no longer be *Judenrein*." At the end of their first *Shabbat* in Beit Hadassah, yeshiva students from Kiryat Arba came to dance and sing outside their new home. She described that moment:

We felt as if the souls of the murdered of this place had come and gathered with us at the window . . . to rejoice with us at the sight of Jews dancing on Saturday evening in the streets of Hebron. I wanted to calm them and say to them, "You can rest, you have waited for many years, now we have returned. What was in the past in Hebron is what will happen in the future. Always!"

The Beit Hadassah settlers, determined to eradicate the shame of their murdered ancestors who had not defended themselves, all but assumed the identity of the martyrs of 1929. "I grew up in the shadow of the fear and terror that emerged whenever the story of the Hebron murderers was told in my home," a settler would recall. "They ask us if we are afraid to live in Hebron," said another. "Those who should be afraid are the Arabs who have not yet apologized for the great massacre." To the new settlers, Tarpat had been the Holocaust writ small; they would become the newest links in an unbreakable chain of Jewish historical continuity in the ancient city of their patriarchs and matriarchs. The dead and the living became partners in the renewal of Jewish life.

In Hebron, Miriam Levinger would say, "one can see the situation of the people of Israel exactly as it is. A small group of Jews surrounded by hostile people. I see the Jewish truth in all its essence." As a Kiryat Arba schoolboy wrote about Machpelah,

I told her tell me,
 tell me, the Cave
 Why are you sad?
 What happened to you
 And she said in a quiet voice
 I have just remembered the massacre of Tarpat.

The new settlement replaced its destroyed predecessor. Its seamless absorption of the past in the present, Michael Feige writes, was "unheard of in the history of collective commemorations."

An infuriated Prime Minister Begin labeled the women "invaders," declaring, "In Israel houses are not seized, not in Hebron and not in Tel Aviv." (Perhaps significantly, however, he included Hebron within Israel.) He ordered soldiers and police to surround the building; nothing—not even food and water—could go in; no one who left would be permitted to return. Nevertheless, some Israeli Cabinet ministers quietly encouraged the military governor of Hebron to provide assistance to the women and children. Rabbi Levinger met with Begin, reminding him that even during the Yom Kippur War, when Israeli military forces had surrounded the Egyptian Third Army, the beleaguered enemy soldiers were permitted to receive food, water, and medical supplies. Surely the women and children in Beit Hadassah deserved no less. Begin relented.

Sarah Nachshon long remembered the terrible living conditions, “without windows and doors—everything wrecked and destroyed—without running water, just a container of water, without electricity, without anything.” But, she added, “We stayed there in order to build and reconstruct the city of Hebron.” Some of the women wavered under the strain of isolation and deprivation; a few left. One morning Miriam Levinger discovered that her six-year-old son had developed highly contagious jaundice. She warned the other mothers, fearing that mass evacuation would follow. No one left. A woman in late pregnancy refused to leave Beit Hadassah to deliver her baby until her return was assured. It was, and she came back with her infant daughter, named Hadassah.

Sarah Nachshon wrote to the Lubavitcher *rebbe*, who had communicated his empathy for Rabbi Levinger’s activities in Hebron, seeking guidance regarding the length of their stay. A few days later, several Orthodox women arrived with his taped response. He cited the biblical text that told of the daughters in families without sons who had approached Moses to claim their inheritance. Like Moses, who referred the matter to God, the rabbi did not know the right answer, but he blessed them. “This gave us so much power,” Sarah Nachshon recalled. The women refused to leave.

Along with supplies of food and water, government indecision also helped to sustain the new settlers. By one vote, the Cabinet permitted the women who were already in Beit Hadassah to remain until further discussion could resolve the impasse. It was finally agreed that every Friday evening, at the beginning of *Shabbat*, one husband could enter the building to recite *Kiddush* over wine. After a month, 600 Kiryat Arba residents gathered outside Beit Hadassah to support the women and children. A week later, 500 women, led by fiery Knesset member Geula Cohen, a veteran of the Irgun during the struggle for statehood, came to demonstrate their support. The women and children of Beit Hadassah remained resolute.

To Prime Minister Begin, the “invaders” were “arrogant and neurotic.” But they had supporters inside the government—especially Ariel Sharon, who came to visit at a delicate time in negotiations with Egypt and commended them. Following Sharon’s visit, restrictions were lifted on arrivals and departures at Beit Hadassah. It was the first step toward the normalization of life in the beleaguered outpost.

The fierce tenacity of the Beit Hadassah women sharply challenged conventional Zionist stereotypes that invariably identified bold assertiveness with masculinity. (The Hebrew word for “weapon,” *zayin*, also means “penis.”) While Zionism had transformed meek and passive *shtetl* men into brave fighters, women had been assigned the power of fertility. Ben-Gurion equated a woman who did not raise four healthy children

with “a soldier who deserts military service.” Israeli women who bore ten or more children were honored as “heroic mothers.” Even the famously brusque Golda Meir, often identified half seriously as the only man in the Israeli Cabinet, cited childbearing as “the greatest privilege we women have compared to men.” In Israel, a woman’s womb became “a national, spiritual and social asset.” Orthodox communities, in particular, were conspicuous for their rigid gender differentiation and segregation. Giving birth might be regarded as a political act, but mothers rarely became political activists.

For the Hebron women, however, motherhood inspired political activism beyond the confines of domesticity. Even in such an assertively masculine society, women could command extraordinary power: Israeli soldiers, after all, had yielded to Sarah Nachshon’s determination to bury her baby in the Hebron cemetery. (Indeed, Amos Elon found “something raw, barbaric, fearsome in it, reminiscent of Greek mythology. This woman, like Antigone, will stop at nothing.”) Not only had a “maternalist strategy” reopened the abandoned cemetery over government and military opposition, but now it had restored Jewish habitation in the heart of Hebron.

Beit Hadassah would prove to be a formative experience for other female settlers. The strategy developed there was subsequently applied to build Gush Emunim hilltop settlements in Samaria, where young mothers with babies endured chilling winter rains in leaking tents to assert Jewish claims to the land. The brutal terrorist murder of a mother of seven on an Israeli bus sparked a spontaneous demonstration of fury by women who refused to leave the site of her death and ultimately built the settlement of Rachelim there.

“To be a mother in Hebron,” recounted Miriam Grabovsky, who moved there with three young children, “is to be a soldier without a uniform, but to always be present at the front.” It required “infinite faith that this was the way to raise children The fundamental requirement is never to fear, ever.” She described herself as “a link in a chain of activists, building Hebron.” Without “the luxury to despair,” she persisted. “We knew, all the time, that an axe was being held above our necks—that the danger of expulsion was real.” Although “we may not succeed . . . we must not give up. We must continue with courage, forward.” In Hebron, she explained, “we have chosen to actively participate in the process of redemption. Even if they expel us . . . will we return, again and again.”

Nor would Rabbi Levinger, the charismatic leader of the Hebron community, be deflected or deterred from his mission. His unrelenting self-sacrifice, along with his fearlessness and volatile temper, became legendary. Convinced that defiance, not deference, would bring results, he

confronted a succession of Israeli political leaders—Dayan, Meir, Rabin, and Begin—without ever backing down. Responding to Arab violence, he demanded “blood for blood.” Unwilling to compromise Jewish claims, Levinger became the intransigent symbol of the Jewish return to Hebron—and the religious-nationalist ardor that inspired and sustained it.

At the end of January 1980, nine months after the move into Beit Hadassah, Yehoshua Saloma, a Kiryat Arba yeshiva student, was murdered in the Hebron market. He was the first settler to be killed by Palestinians since the Six-Day War. At his grave, Rabbi Waldman eulogized his student: “The voice of our brethren’s blood is crying out to us from the earth of the Land of Israel, from the earth of Hebron, a cry of innocent blood that had been spilled from 1929 until this day.” He demanded, “The blood is calling us to release the chains of the Jewish settlement in Hebron.”

The next day, Kiryat Arba settlers seized five empty Jewish-owned buildings in Hebron, demanding the right to resettle there. The army imposed a twelve-day curfew on the Arab population. Attacks on settlers and soldiers escalated, but Defense Minister Weizmann insisted on “restraint and forbearance.” He was worried, he told the Knesset, about the impact of retaliation on “world opinion.” Amid rising tension in Hebron, the women and children of Beit Hadassah were unyielding. Although the Begin government remained sharply divided over the return of Jews to Hebron, in a delayed response to Saloma’s murder, the Cabinet voted in March by a bare eight-to-six majority to authorize the establishment of a yeshiva there.

Hebron Arabs were enraged. At a mass rally following the Cabinet decision, Mayor Fahad Kawasmeh declared, “We have no choice but to put force against force. The Zionist empire will fall, just as the British empire and Nazi empire fell before her.” Sheikh Raja Bayud Tamimi, the *qadi* of Hebron, insisted, “The Jews have to know that this land is Muslim and that it is entirely Muslim. . . . We’ll fight until you, the Jews, are wiped out.” Mayor Mohammed Milhem of nearby Halhoul warned, “It is time to act. What was taken by power will only be returned by power.”

Their voices were heard and heeded. In a nearby cave at the edge of the city, four Arab men prepared a response. Two lived in Hebron; their partners had crossed into Israel from Jordan with instructions from Yasir Arafat’s Fatah to link up with a local terrorist cell. Before the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath on Friday, May 2, they stationed themselves on the roof of a building overlooking Beit Hadassah and in an adjacent doorway. Earlier that afternoon, the head of the Kiryat Arba council had met with the military governor of Hebron to warn him of the deteriorating security situation, only to be reassured that there was no cause for concern.

After the conclusion of the *Shabbat* service inside *Me’arat HaMachpelah*, several dozen Jews walked to Beit Hadassah, just a few minutes away,

as they had done every Friday evening for more than a year. Young men and women walked together, singing the same verse from Jeremiah that the children sang after their arrival in Beit Hadassah—"Your children shall return to their borders." Among them were Aharon and Meirah Priel, a newly married couple; Zvi Glatt, a recent immigrant enjoying his first *Shabbat* in Hebron; yeshiva students Yaakov Zimmerman and Hannan Krautheimer; and Eli Ha'zeev, winner of a Silver Star for bravery in Vietnam who came to Israel during the Yom Kippur War and converted to Judaism. Awaiting them were four Arabs, armed with assault rifles and hand grenades.

As the Jews began to cross the footbridge to Beit Hadassah, they were caught in a withering crossfire of bullets and grenades. Ha'zeev was killed instantly, before he could even reach for his gun. Aharon Priel, mortally wounded, took shelter with his wife behind a stone wall, where he bled to death within minutes. While Miriam Levinger, trained as a nurse, worked desperately to treat the wounded, Glatt, Zimmerman, and two others died. She would say, "Not only were their lives a continuation of the lives of the murdered community [of 1929], but also their deaths."

After each terrorist attack, however, the precarious Jewish foothold in Hebron expanded. The Saloma murder had prompted government approval for the Beit Hadassah settlement. Now settlers moved into the nearby Avraham Avinu quarter. In time, Beit HaShisha ("House of the Six"), built adjacent to Beit Hadassah, commemorated the victims of that massacre. From each Jewish death in Hebron would come new Jewish life.

The cluster of restored buildings formed a loosely contiguous Jewish neighborhood near the old center of Hebron. It was only a short walk from Beit Hadassah, Beit Romano, and Avraham Avinu to Machpelah. One government master plan, looking beyond this germinating community, called for ultimate contiguity of settlement, with the Hebron neighborhood extending to Kiryat Arba, up the hill less than a mile away. The result would be "a physically and functionally separate Jewish quarter," bordering on the Arab market. The plan was never implemented, but with their dramatically assertive demonstration of "maternal politics," the women of Beit Hadassah had paved the way for the renewal of Jewish life in Hebron.

Rather than enlarge the burgeoning community, the Israeli government strictly limited the growth of the Jewish population in Hebron. After six years, only thirty Jewish families and several dozen yeshiva students lived among 60,000 Arabs. Relations between Arabs and Jews ran the gamut from polite encounters and mundane commercial transactions to premeditated murder. Jews shopped in the Arab market, were treated by Arab dentists, and had their hair trimmed by Arab barbers. Arabs used the post office, bank, and parks in Kiryat Arba and purchased liquor there

(prohibited in Hebron). Occasionally, they retained Kiryat Arba lawyer Elyakim Haetzni to represent them in legal proceedings.

At the other extreme, however, the “ugly atmosphere” in Hebron, according to an Israeli investigating commission, was expressed in “repeated cycles of violent incidents.” Jewish settlers, the commission reported, felt “permanently exposed to Arab hostilities.” Hebron Arabs complained that “repeated acts of harassment and intimidation” by settlers went unpunished. Although complaints of looting, property damage, and arson often went unanswered, the Israeli army occasionally demolished Arab homes for security reasons.

Despite Moshe Dayan’s wish for “harmonious coexistence” in the Cave of the Patriarchs, the enclosure remained a site of constant friction and confrontation. After several episodes of theft and desecration—prayer books, Torah scrolls, and the Koran were vandalized—Israeli soldiers were posted inside the mosque. Machpelah—part mosque, part synagogue, and occasional battleground—had become contested sacred space where even in prayer discordant Jewish and Muslim voices asserted competing religious and national claims.

The presence of Israeli soldiers on patrol in Hebron, whether checking identity papers, directing traffic, chasing stone throwers, or shutting stores during curfews, was a constant irritant to local Arabs. To the settlers, however, the problem was that soldiers frequently did too little too late. When explosives were thrown at a Jewish residence, a soldier on guard did not respond, explaining, “I thought I’d be put in jail if I opened fire.” Reluctant to use their weapons even when Jews confronted life-threatening situations, lest they face prison terms or court-martial, soldiers had an ambivalent relationship with the settlers, who demanded more assertive protection than military commanders and politicians were willing to provide and vented their fury when it was withheld.

The Israeli government remained a source of continuing frustration. While Jews were murdered in what Hebron settlers described as Arab “pogroms,” the government seemed as indifferent, if not hostile, to the plight of Jews as foreign rulers traditionally had been. Zionism was loudly proclaimed as the antidote to Jewish powerlessness, yet just twenty miles from Jerusalem the Israeli government—the proud embodiment of Jewish power—seemed helpless to protect its own people. The forced evacuation of Israeli settlers from Yamit in the Sinai, portending the ultimate relinquishment of Judea and Samaria to the Palestinians, sounded an ominous warning to the entire settlement movement.

The absence of adequate protection from the government or military and the slaughter of Jews at Beit Hadassah galvanized the Hebron community into retaliation. “We found that if we don’t react,” a settler explained, “the Arabs will translate it as a sign of weakness.” In the

spring of 1980, a conference of rabbis and other settlement leaders was convened in Kiryat Arba. Amid discussion of government weakness, settlers expressed feelings of abandonment and frustration. Reprisals were proposed. Menachem Livni, who had lived in Kiryat Arba for nearly ten years while working to restore the Hebron Jewish Quarter, was the designated leader. He approached Rabbi Levinger for guidance in choosing “pure people, highly observant and sinless, people with no shred of violence in them and who are disinclined to reckless action,” for acts of vengeance.

Joined by Yehuda Etzion, a leader of the Elon Moreh settlement in Samaria, they devised a plan to conceal explosives in the cars of five Arab mayors whose outspoken support for the Palestine Liberation Organization and evident hostility to Jewish settlement was well known. Small clusters of settlers from all over Judea and Samaria (who subsequently became known as the *Machteret*, or Underground) were secretly enlisted for a coordinated attack. Several rabbis, Rabbi Levinger and Rabbi Waldman among them, were consulted; all of them, according to Hebron settler Shaul Nir, “expressed their support for warning operations within the Arab public.” With the end of the thirty-day Jewish mourning period for the Beit Hadassah victims, the settler vigilantes acted. The mayors of Nablus and Ramallah were seriously wounded by car bombs; the others escaped unharmed, but an Israeli demolitions expert was blinded when he accidentally activated an explosive device.

Then, in July 1983, Aharon Gross, an eighteen-year-old student in the Shavei Hebron yeshiva, was returning from morning prayers. He had joined Rabbi Levinger, who was holding a one-man sit-down strike in a tent near the military government building to protest the lack of security for Hebron Jews. Attacked in the crowded Hebron market by three Arabs who slit his throat, Gross became the eighth Jew to be murdered in Hebron since the women and children had moved into Beit Hadassah. Explaining the reluctance of Israeli soldiers who had witnessed the murderous attack to intervene, a local military commander told Levinger’s son-in-law, “Better one of your people than one of ours.”

Following Aharon Gross’s murder, his Hebron friend Shaul Nir and Uzi Sharbaf, Rabbi Levinger’s son-in-law, retaliated by attacking the Hebron Islamic College, viewed by settlers as a local center of Arab incitement. Concealing their identity and armed with guns and grenades for an assault planned by Livni, they killed three students and wounded more than thirty others. The Islamic College attack sharply split community leaders. Rabbi Levinger insisted, “Whoever did this has sanctified God’s name in public.” The Kiryat Arba Council was divided. “This is not our way and not our doing,” said the chairman. But his deputy declined to express regret: “If Jews did it—more power to them.” Elyakim Haetzni,

a council member, ambiguously asserted “the sanctity of human life and the fulfillment of Jewish sovereignty.”

Livni and Etzion had already begun to stockpile weapons in pursuit of a potentially calamitous plan to demolish the Dome of the Rock, the sacred Muslim enclosure on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, site of the ancient Jewish temples. Livni, an engineer, demolitions expert, and captain in the army reserves, agreed that preparations should begin, but he insisted that there be no operational decision for implementation. Discouraged by the rabbis from whom they sought support, they temporarily shelved their idea, which had been tentatively timed to coincide with the final evacuation of Jewish settlers from the Sinai in 1982. Livni believed that only “a united nation and its government” should conduct such an operation, which surely would have inflicted horrific consequences on Israel had it ever been implemented.

A wave of deadly Palestinian terrorist attacks on Israeli buses in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Ashkelon galvanized the group once again. Nir and Sharbaf, the Islamic College attackers, and Barak Nir, also from Kiryat Arba-Hebron, decided to retaliate by attaching explosives beneath five Arab buses in East Jerusalem. They timed their attack for a Friday afternoon in April 1984, just before *Shabbat*, when few Jews were likely to be traveling on the roads. But the arrival of Shin Bet security police, who had been monitoring their activities for several months, aborted the attempt. In a sweeping dragnet, twenty-seven Israeli settlers (six of whom lived or once had lived in Kiryat Arba-Hebron) were arrested for their participation or complicity in acts of violence. Rabbis Levinger and Waldman were interrogated by the police on suspicion of their links to the Underground.

The exposure of the *Machteret* sent shock waves through Israel. Widely condemned as false messiahs who had done irreparable harm to their cause and to the nation they professed to love so passionately, they had little support beyond the settler communities. President Chaim Herzog blamed “irresponsible, irrational individuals” who “might have brought disaster upon the people of Israel, the state, and the Zionist enterprise.” According to the popular weekly magazine *Koteret Rashit*, “What began as a minor, almost charming act of deceit in the Park Hotel in Hebron on the eve of Passover, 1968, was destined to develop into a murderous underground powered by crazy messianism.” An editorial in the independent newspaper *Maariv* declared, “The assumption that a minority can decide because it is wiser, more loyal, and more patriotic than the majority . . . shakes the consensus on which every free government is based; it is the absolute antithesis of democratic government.” In an anguished letter, Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun condemned Yehuda Etzion, his former student, for bringing “*esh zarah* into the holy dwelling place”—an explicit reference

to biblical Korach and his followers, whose idolatrous fire signified their rebellion against the leadership of Moses.

To many settlers, however, the *Machteret* defendants were Israel's "true pioneers, saints, and martyrs," who had demonstrated devotion to their faith, their nation, and the Land of Israel. Rabbi Israel Ariel, the rabbi of Yamit in the Sinai who had called on Israeli soldiers to disobey orders to evacuate settlers there, asked, "Were they not motivated by the desire to fulfill religious commands? Isn't the reason [that] Israeli security is negligent and indulgent of Arab terror?" Other settlement leaders struggled to balance justification of the defendants' motives with condemnation of their actions. "We've got to remember," said Benny Katzover, "that people in Hebron experienced the Beit Hadassah massacre and the murders of Saloma and Gross, may God avenge their blood. They've also gone through the bureaucratic political foot-dragging that's prevented them from developing the city's Jewish Quarter and the government's failure to handle its security duties."

Responding to Palestinian terrorism and government inertia, Underground members had returned an eye for an eye. The Hebron community, Menachem Livni told his interrogators, rejected "the cheapening of Jewish blood" that resulted from the Israeli policy of "passive defense." "For the very sake of preserving life," Yehuda Etzion insisted, *ein breira*—there was "no alternative." Shaul Nir asserted, "We did what we did only because the Government of Israel ignored our outcry and kept its head in the sand":

We are commanded to love and respect every creature. But an intolerable situation has arisen in Israel. Jews find it impossible to live peacefully and with dignity, and live instead in the shadow of a constant lack of security. . . . As Jews and as human beings, we cannot ignore the moral imperative of self-defense. . . . Our actions are meant to show the Arab population that continued terrorist activity or identification with it will bring unpleasant results. But above all, they are intended to alert the Israeli authorities to the need to enforce law and order, and to stop standing idly by while Jewish blood is spilled.

Judge Shmuel Finkelman, who as a military judge had presided over the trials of the Beit Hadassah killers and Aharon Gross's murderer, now presided over the trial of their avengers. Citing extenuating circumstances, he declared,

This group of men . . . is unique. Most, if not all of them, have both yeshiva and academic education. Most have served in the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] and have taken part in Israel's wars. . . . Most are men of Torah and labor, who left behind an easy way of life and went with their families to establish,

develop, and protect Jewish settlements. . . . The crime of some of the defendants lay in the fervor of their religious faith; like the rebels under Korach, each picked up his pan of incense and loaded it with idolatrous fire against God's command. The transgressions of people like these are not like the crimes committed by others who aimed to destroy, kill, annihilate.

Judge Finkelman carefully distinguished premeditated Palestinian terrorism from the retaliatory acts of Underground members, locating the crimes of the *Machteret* within "the fervor of their religious faith." Considering the illegal acts of the settlers in the context of Arab murder and government inaction, he found reasons to mitigate their punishment.

Judge Yaakov Bazak, an observant Jew (who displayed a portrait of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook in his judicial office), praised the defendants as "good people imbued with faith." He recognized the feeling of "helplessness and fear" among Hebron settlers after government failures to deter or respond to terrorist attacks. The Islamic College in Hebron, he noted, "teaches with great fanaticism hatred of Jews." He cited government "failings" as reasons for the despair that drove them to violent retaliation for the murders of their friends.

During a prolonged recess in the trial, the Israeli government agreed to exchange more than 1,100 Arab prisoners, including the Beit Hadasah murderers, Gross's killer, and an array of other convicted terrorists, for three Israeli soldiers captured during the early years of the Lebanon War. (Before long, Gross's assailant returned as a tour guide in Hebron, where he included the murder site in his itinerary.) The horrific deeds of the Arab prisoners and the unprecedented scope of the exchange confronted the court with a wrenching conundrum: would Arab terrorists go free while Israelis who had retaliated against terrorism were severely punished?

At the sentencing hearings, Major General Rehavam Ze'evi, the former military commander of the territories with deep family roots in Hebron, endorsed Shaul Nir's criticism of the government for its inadequate protection of Jewish lives. Ze'evi (who would be assassinated by Palestinian terrorists in 2001) described the precarious security situation before the attacks on the Arab mayors: "The governments of Israel did not do their duty toward the Jewish citizens who live in the territories. They left them exposed to stones and bombs." Affirming that democratic procedures offered the only legitimate channels of redress, he nonetheless reminded the court that the defendants—"pioneers, men of vision and faith"—had taken the law in their own hands "only after they had despaired of . . . the use of democratic pressure."

Hebron settlers Menachem Livni and Uzi Sharbaf, along with Shaul Nir, were found guilty of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment.

The other defendants received prison terms ranging from three to nine years. Nir told a television reporter, "I'd rather have my parents visit me in prison than in the cemetery, as Aharon Gross's parents do." Within two years, twenty of the Underground prisoners were released, and the life sentences for Livni, Nir, and Sharbatf were reduced to ten years. With time off for good behavior, they left prison after seven years.

It was "stunning," wrote Gershom Gorenberg, "how little time the underground's members spent behind bars." The Israeli legal system, he complained, "dealt with the underground's members as if their crime were a surfeit of patriotism; the subversiveness of their intent was ignored." It was not a defective legal system, however, but rather the government's decision to release the very Arab prisoners whose terrorist attacks had prompted retaliation from the Underground that undermined the argument for incarcerating Livni, Nir, and Sharbatf for life.

The exposure and punishment of the Underground seemed to settle, at least for the moment, the simmering crisis of legitimacy raised by its vigilante actions. But there were angry recriminations. Hebron Jews felt betrayed and blamed the government for its inadequate protection and drastic restrictions on further settlement. To their critics on the left, abbreviated prison terms and clemency constituted meager punishment for such appalling criminal acts. In the end, however, government officials—including judges and, ultimately, the president of Israel, who granted clemency—were unwilling to punish Jews more harshly than Palestinians for crimes of murder.

Twenty years after the Six-Day War, the Israeli government, whether led by Labor or Likud, remained ambivalent about the settler movement. Hebron Jews, after all, hardly were the first Zionists to settle among Arabs. (In Yafo, until it became Jaffa in 1948, small numbers of Jews had lived amid a substantial Arab majority.) But Hebron settlers were religious Zionists who were determined to return to the place where the Jewish people had its deepest historical roots. Prime Minister Begin, addressing the Knesset in May 1982, pointedly confronted Labor Zionist ambivalence over settlement:

Settlement . . . almost 100 years ago, in areas of the Land of Israel populated by Arabs and sometimes solely by Arabs—was it moral or immoral? Permitted or forbidden? One of the two. . . . If that decision was moral, and we [Zionists] all boast of 100 years of settlement, then today's settlement . . . is moral. Or do you have a double standard?

Government settlement policy—especially regarding Kiryat Arba and Hebron—had vacillated between quiet encouragement, stoic forbearance, and hostile outrage. Its ambivalent indecision left settlers in an exceedingly vulnerable position, often forced to defend themselves in the ab-

sence of government and military protection. During the 1970s and 1980s, the formative years of the settlement movement, the Israeli government was too internally divided either to encourage and protect them or to discourage and remove them.

Consequently, the Israeli army was trapped within the indecision of political leaders. Soldiers were assigned to Hebron to maintain order and safety, yet they were instructed to intervene as little as possible, even when Jewish lives were at extreme risk (as Aharon Gross's murder tragically demonstrated). With hesitant and ambivalent government approval, with the presence of soldiers whose hands were tied by government constraints, settlers finally saw no choice but to take matters into their own hands.

The trial of the *Machteret* closed the formative period of Hebron settlement. Despite devastating community losses along the way, there had been stunning achievements. Led by Rabbi Levinger, settlers had restored Jewish life in Hebron after fifty years. Jewish property was reclaimed and inhabited, new homes were built, the Avraham Avinu synagogue was reconstructed, and the ancient cemetery was reopened. A master plan called for 500 Jewish dwelling units in Hebron for 3,000 people. Kiryat Arba, including the adjacent Har Sina neighborhood two kilometers to the north that was opened to settlement in 1980, had a population of 3,000, with the capacity to expand sevenfold.

The determination of handfuls of Israelis to reclaim Jewish space in Hebron had been driven by irrepressible memories, both ancient and modern. Amid her grief, Sarah Nachshon turned to the biblical text to poignantly express her own deep sense of identification, return, and renewal. In her own childlike innocence, the young girl in Beit Hadasah had drawn on biblical memory to explain to the Israeli soldier that the ladder for their entry was provided by their forefather Jacob. So, too, Miriam Levinger had insisted at the end of her first *Shabbat* in Beit Hadasah, "What was in the past in Hebron is what will happen in the future. Always!" In a community of memory, past and present converged until they became virtually inseparable.

So, too, several men from Kiryat Arba-Hebron—intrigued by Michal Arbal's exploration of *Me'arat HaMachpelah* in 1967 and determined to rediscover their ancient past in the city of their patriarchs—studied Moshe Dayan's sketches of her exploration and planned their own subterranean expedition. After a midnight prayer service during Elul, the month of repentance preceding Rosh Hashanah, they chiseled their way past the stone that had obstructed Michal's access and descended into a tunnel leading to a circular room. There they encountered—as had explorers centuries before them—a strange wind blowing from between stones wedged into the ground beneath them. Removing the stones, they discovered "a cave of rock, leading into the earth."

Forced to crawl, they reached a smaller cave beyond, deep underground, where they discovered bones and pottery fragments. The bones were unidentifiable, but the pottery, they realized, came from the First Temple era, which had ended with the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. It was an astonishing confirmation of the sanctity of the site to their Jewish forebears. "Wind blew in the caves, but the sounds of our hearts pounding was audible," recalled Noam Arnon. "No living being had been this close to the Patriarchs in thousands of years." The men prayed silently, feeling reunited "as Sons with their Fathers."

But their synthesis of religion and nationalism isolated Hebron settlers from the Zionist consensus. In the 1980s, the Israeli secular majority was increasingly drawing inspiration from cultural fashions in Europe and the United States, not from the biblical text. Hebron settlers remembered biblical promises and ancient claims that few Israelis beyond Orthodox communities any longer took seriously. As Kiryat Arba historian Yossi Sharvit wrote, in a commemorative book for the slain yeshiva students,

One should know and recognize that we add our stones to the ones built by our fathers. We do not start something new but just add layers to the fortress walls built through the ages, . . . adding the memory of ancient days with the passion of renewal.

To Hebron Jews, it seemed self-evident: the massacre and exile of 1929 must become the prelude to return. But, Sharvit lamented, "we cannot but say the truth—we [Israelis] did not know that we have returned home." Secular Zionists were uninspired by a biblical real estate transaction or by the slaughter of Orthodox Jews fifty years earlier. Only the settlers, Michael Feige observed, "truly and profoundly comprehend the meaning of divine promise and love of the land, things that have been long forgotten by the modern and mostly secular Israeli population." Elyakim Haetzni explained, "Hebron is part of our genetic code. Once my genetic needle pointed towards Hebron, I felt an electric shock. In Hebron I feel for the first time at home." The Cave of Machpelah, a Hebron settler insisted, "is the centre of our life . . . the point of convergence between heaven and earth."

Hebron settlement expressed the determination of a small group of religious nationalists to revitalize traditional Judaism and invigorate Zionism, which had begun to atrophy into Israeli "normalization." The settler movement, Gideon Aran writes, sought to restore "the duality of nation and religion [that] has existed within Judaism from its very beginnings, and has accompanied it through history as a distinguishing feature." It was precisely that entwined duality, however, that Jewish modernity—with its

tempting promises of enlightenment, emancipation, and assimilation—had torn asunder, even among Zionists in the Jewish state.

Committed to “the national narrative of Zionism” and to the ancient religious texts that framed it, Hebron Jews had replicated the biblical journey from mournful exile to triumphant return. They braided divine command and biblical promise, ancestral graves and holy sites, with sorrowful memories of Tarpat and Zionist zeal for renewal. Returning to Hebron, they encountered hostile, even murderously violent local Palestinians and an ambivalent Israeli government that was reluctant either to protect Jews in the City of the Patriarchs or to expel them. For infusing Zionism with Judaism, Hebron Jews were castigated as religious zealots and isolated as Zionist pariahs.

7



Crisis

The Palestinian intifada, the uprising that erupted in Gaza in December 1987, spread quickly to Judea and Samaria. Israeli settlements were plunged into a war zone. Riding a bus, driving to work, hitchhiking to an army base, or transporting children to school became life-threatening activities. During five years of turmoil, the Israeli army struggled—largely unsuccessfully—to find effective ways to suppress the violence without inflicting excessive harm on youthful Palestinian insurgents. Whatever it did, however, generated ever more lurid and hostile media coverage both in Israel and abroad. Palestinian rock and firebomb throwers were transformed into embattled Davids boldly confronting a lumbering, vindictive Israeli Goliath.

Widespread Palestinian civil disobedience—mass strikes, daily shop closings, and angry retaliation against recalcitrant merchants—engulfed the territories. In Kiryat Arba, Elyakim Haetzni was told by Arab clients that unless Israeli authorities employed an “iron fist” to deter and punish the Palestinian *shabiba*, these young men would control the Arab street. Their prediction was validated. A government commission led by Judge Meir Shamgar, president of the High Court of Justice, documented Palestinian acts of violence in the territories during five years of turmoil: 150,000 stoning incidents, 5,655 Molotov cocktails thrown, nearly 3,000 assaults and knifings, 281 shootings, and 256 hand-grenade attacks. Sixty-four Israelis were killed during the intifada, and nearly 4,000 were injured.

Jewish settlers were caught in the vortex. Dependent on the army for protection, they were frustrated by government constraints on the military, which left them increasingly vulnerable. In September 1988, Rabbi

Levinger's son was driving through the center of Hebron with his father and three other family members when a stone shattered the front windshield of their car. Reporting the incident at a nearby Israeli checkpoint, Rabbi Levinger requested an army patrol. While the Levinger family awaited safe passage, Palestinian stone throwers targeted the checkpoint where they had taken refuge. After firing several pistol shots in the air, to no avail, Levinger boldly headed downhill toward the stone throwers. Shooting to disperse them, he killed a forty-two-year-old merchant standing outside his store and wounded a customer.

Arrested and indicted for manslaughter, Levinger agreed in a plea bargain to negligent homicide under extenuating circumstances. The prosecutor asked for an eighteen-month sentence, which the judge reduced to twelve months with seven months suspended. Levinger claimed that he was convicted for "a minor charge . . . based on the fact that I did not shoot accurately while I was in danger." The presiding judge cited Levinger as "a prominent individual and the father of eleven children. His primary concern and care, for some twenty years, has been the interest of the public he leads." With time off for good behavior, the rabbi served three months in prison.

Settlers demanded an end to attacks against Jews. But the government equivocated lest the display of force necessary to stifle Palestinian violence antagonize President George Bush and Secretary of State James Baker, who were relentlessly pressuring Israel to be more conciliatory. On the Israeli left and in world opinion, settlers were excoriated for obstructing the Palestinian struggle to liberate themselves from Israeli occupation and oppression. At a Peace Now rally in 1989, Amos Oz castigated the settlers as "a stupid and cruel messianic sect, a band of armed gangsters, criminals against humanity . . . that emerged from some dark corner of Judaism . . . in order to establish a blood-thirsty and insane cult."

The narrow election victory of Yitzhak Rabin in 1992 transformed Israeli politics after fifteen years of Likud political domination. During the campaign, Rabin had steadfastly proclaimed his refusal to negotiate with Palestine Liberation Organization terrorists, clearly stating his opposition to statehood under PLO rule. Yet just one year later, after elaborate back-channel negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian representatives in Oslo, the Rabin government sharply reversed course, agreeing to recognize the PLO and relinquish portions of the biblical homeland for promises of peace. With palpable hesitation and calculated ambiguity, Yasir Arafat seemed to renounce terrorism and violence while apparently acknowledging Israel's right to exist in peace and security. With Israelis weary of endless conflict and with their government despairing of its ability to suppress the uprising, Rabin was prepared to delegate authority to Arafat to control his own people.

In September 1993, Rabin and Arafat shook hands on the White House lawn to seal their agreement. "Enough of blood and tears," Rabin proclaimed before President Clinton, assembled guests, and an enthusiastic world audience. It was, Clinton proudly announced, a "great occasion of history." Chairman Arafat agreed, declaring it a "historic event, inaugurating a new epoch." Foreign Minister Shimon Peres thought he could discern "the outline of peace in the Middle East." The famous handshake seemed to symbolize the triumph of peaceful diplomacy over violence.

But in Hebron, the only city in the territories where Jews (fewer than fifty families) lived among Arabs, the Israeli-Palestinian agreement signified the betrayal and imminent abandonment of their community. Repudiating his campaign promises and electoral mandate, Rabin had extended legitimacy to the PLO, assented to the release of Palestinian prisoners convicted for heinous murders of Jews, and even agreed to provide Arafat with weapons that could be—and, indeed, soon were—used against Israelis. Exhausted by the conflict, the Rabin government had reverted to what Harvard professor Ruth R. Wisse has identified as "the Diaspora strategy of accommodation." As events subsequently proved, it "had been conned into substituting a wish for a possibility."

At a conference of rabbis in Kiryat Arba, the Rabin-Arafat handshake was denounced as a covenant with terrorists. "Giving parts of the Land of Israel to non-Jews is strictly forbidden" under Jewish law, they insisted. "Never before," the rabbis asserted, "has any Israeli government or kingdom been willing to hand over parts of Eretz Israel to our enemy." The actions of the Rabin government, they concluded, signified "a spiritual crisis, a break from our roots."

Precisely as Hebron settlers had anticipated, the restrained Israeli response to the intifada, followed by recognition of the PLO in the Oslo accords, triggered unprecedented waves of terrorism. By 1994, Kiryat Arba historian Arie Klein recalled, the atmosphere in Hebron was "bleak," as "more and more names of friends were added to the list of the dead." A reserve-duty soldier guarding the Machpelah generator was shot and killed. Yeshiva student Erez Shmuel was stabbed to death on his way to Friday evening prayers at Machpelah. Just outside the city, Rabbi Chaim Druckman, a veteran activist in the settlement movement, was wounded in an ambush that killed his driver. In December 1993, Pinchas Lapid, a Soviet refusenik who had worked tirelessly to build the Elon Moreh settlement, and his son Shalom, a Kiryat Arba yeshiva student, were shot to death near the Glass junction in downtown Hebron. It would not be long, Klein predicted, until the "Hebron pressure pot exploded."

Pinchas Lapid died in the arms of his devoted friend, Dr. Baruch Goldstein, chief medical officer for the Kiryat Arba-Hebron community. Born in 1956 to Orthodox parents in Brooklyn—his mother traced her ancestry

to the founder of the Lubavitch Hasidic dynasty, and family members had been among the Hebron massacre victims in 1929—Goldstein had graduated from the Flatbush Yeshiva, Yeshiva University, and the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, where he received his medical degree in 1981. He learned what he later called “basic Zionism” at home and in school but conceded that his understanding was “a little bit shaky.” In college he had encountered the writings of Rabbi Meir Kahane, the militant founder of the Jewish Defense League. Kahane had “a positive influence on me,” Goldstein acknowledged. “I reached the conclusion that for Jews, Israel is the only place to be, and Torah is the only way to live.”

Goldstein became active in Rabbi Kahane’s JDL and embraced its goals as he understood them: “to strengthen Jewish consciousness among Jews” and to defend Jews, with physical force if necessary, “against the aggression and cruelty of the non-Jews.” In a published letter in 1981, he wrote, “The harsh reality is: if Israel is to avert facing the kinds of problems found in Northern Ireland today, it must act decisively to remove the Arab minority from within its borders.” Rabbi Kahane’s deepening influence on Goldstein was evident.

Two years after his graduation from medical school, Goldstein made *aliyah* and enlisted in the Israeli army. He established contact with Kach (“Thus”), Kahane’s political party, and was married in Kiryat Arba by the rabbi he had come to admire. He realized that his consuming medical duties kept him from being “as active in [Kach] as I should have been.” Yet within a year after his arrival in Israel, he became the third-ranking candidate on Kach’s Knesset list. After the party was banned from the Knesset in 1986 as “racist,” Goldstein was elected to several terms on the Kiryat Arba Council. In a campaign document, he declared, “Our future in this place is connected with our ability to convey a Jewish-Zionist message to the nation of Israel.” But as a council member, he advocated mainstream social concerns (improved safety, increased immigrant absorption, and enhanced medical care) while opposing condemnation of settler retaliation for Palestinian attacks.

Goldstein combined political militancy with professional skill and personal compassion. In 1990 he was arrested for ripping up an order prohibiting the entry of non-Muslims to *Me’arat HaMachpelah* on a Muslim holiday. He was again arrested a year later on suspicion of overturning a bookcase containing copies of the Koran in the Isaac Hall, allegedly in response to the damage of Jewish sacred objects by Muslims the previous day. Yet as the emergency physician for Jewish settlers in Kiryat Arba and Hebron, Goldstein was greatly admired and respected. Known for his compassion and regarded by many as a *tzadik*, a righteous man, he never hesitated to drive alone at any hour of the day or night to help someone in need of medical attention. On at least one occasion he treated a wounded

Palestinian militant, and a Hebron Arab acknowledged that during a medical emergency Goldstein had saved his life. A fellow doctor recalled, "He never screamed, never raised his voice or lost his patience, even though placed under constant, endless, almost superhuman tension."

But with the spread of Palestinian terror attacks after the Oslo accords were signed, Goldstein's mood darkened. When Israeli President Ezer Weizmann visited Kiryat Arba, Goldstein pinned a yellow star to his clothing to protest government inaction. Ronit Keller, a nurse who worked with him, noticed that "it seemed that every attack took another piece of his zest for life away, his stature got bent, and the sadness in his eyes refused to go away." After the murder of a Jew in nearby Sussia, she found Goldstein in the clinic, crying. He told her, "I don't understand how it is possible that Jewish blood is being spilled and there is a government that does nothing about it." He was, she remembered, "very angry and hurt." After Pinhas Lapid died in his arms, Goldstein appeared to those close to him to be "very broken and depressed." His wife Miriam, who knew that "he wasn't a man of words," remembered that he was "hurting and silent." He was "a quiet man," a Kiryat Arba neighbor recalled, "but in his heart he was seething with anger."

In early February 1994, during Muslim prayer in Machpelah, Sheikh Tamimi delivered a sermon, recorded by the Israel Civil Administration, in which he assured his listeners that "for those who fly the flag of the armed struggle and those who kill, . . . their deeds are writ in gold, theirs are exalted acts in the battle between believers and the infidels." Then, during the week before the Purim holiday that celebrates the triumph of Persian Jews over the wicked Haman, bent on their destruction, American tourists praying in Machpelah heard the terrifying shouts from nearby Arabs, *Etbach el Yahud* ("Kill the Jews"). Hamas flyers, calling for an attack against Jews, reached the office of the Hebron District Civil Administration, and reports of impending Arab violence circulated within local military circles. At least nine military officers reported information about an imminent Arab attack expected to coincide with Purim. Sergeant Kobi Yosef, whose soldiers guarded the entrance to Machpelah, was alerted to show "extreme vigilance" because there was a "hot tip" that Arabs planned to bring explosives into the enclosure.

Based on these reports, General Shaul Mofaz, commander of Israeli military forces in Judea and Samaria, and Colonel Meir Kalifi, commander of the Hebron regiment, called an unprecedented emergency meeting of the Kiryat Arba Council three days before the Purim holiday. They conveyed an "acute warning" of a planned Hamas attack, anticipated for Purim morning during Jewish prayer. Orders had already been given for the deployment of special army units. They strongly advised the community—especially its medical staff—to make appropriate

preparations. When Goldstein learned of the meeting, he was deeply upset. He wondered, "Will you allow this to happen? Why not take action to avoid this catastrophe?" He spoke with his wife Miriam about the abandonment of the settlers by the government, the army, and the police, none of whom seemed willing to do their job properly.

Goldstein was not alone in his apprehension. In the days preceding Purim, Miriam Levinger remembered feelings of "ominous dread" in Hebron: "Something terrible was going to happen. Arabs were mocking us and spitting at us. A noose was being tightened." On the day before Purim, the popular Israeli newspaper *Yediot Aharonot* reported that Hamas had alerted Hebron Arabs to stock up with food and provisions in anticipation of the military curfew that would inevitably follow an impending "large attack" on Jews. A government investigation would conclude that "warnings of an attack had been given . . . an attack by the Hamas was expected." Among Hebron Jews, terrifying reminders of 1929 were rekindled.

With Purim and Ramadan overlapping and reports of imminent violence circulating, a meeting was arranged between the military governor of Hebron and the sheikh of Machpelah. Prayer times were apportioned for Thursday evening, when the *Megillah* story of Esther and Mordechai would be read, and Friday morning, when both Jews and Muslims would hold religious services. Because the *Megillah* reading extended the normal time of their evening service, Jews received permission to remain in the spacious Isaac Hall until 8:00 P.M.

Before the holiday began, Baruch Goldstein enjoyed a "very happy meal" with his family. Joined by his wife, he went for his usual evening stroll with his children. "He took the baby in his arms," Miriam remembered, "and walked with her as he always did." Then he went to Machpelah for the *Megillah* reading. The Purim celebration is a raucous service, with the loud rattling of noisemakers, accompanied by hisses and shouts, whenever Haman's name is mentioned. For many centuries, Jews had taken special delight in the account in the Book of Esther of their Persian ancestors who had meted out to their enemy the dire fate that he had planned for them. It vividly recounts the moment of revenge when "the Jews smote all their enemies with the sword, slaughtering, and destroying them, and did as they pleased to those who hated them" (Esther 9:5).

That holiday evening, the lengthy Purim service was increasingly punctuated by loud and angry shouts from Muslims outside Isaac Hall. By 7:15, a crowd of several hundred men had gathered in the corridor, impatiently awaiting the end of the *Megillah* reading. Infuriated by the delay, they again began to shout, "*Eitbach el Yahud.*" A Jewish worshipper recalled, "The Arabs were screaming out during our prayers that Jews should be slaughtered." Amid the tumult, Goldstein, unable to concen-

trate on the reading, became so upset that he left the service. A Beit Haddassah resident had just arrived outside the hall, where he heard Muslims screaming and saw them banging on doors and spitting. At that moment, Goldstein emerged, clearly shaken, in tears, crying, "I cannot tolerate this anymore." He returned to Kiryat Arba for the conclusion of the service.

On Purim morning, Jews would be reminded by the Torah reading that God waged perennial war against Amalek, their enemy in every generation. That Friday, February 25, Goldstein awakened unusually early. Dressed in his military uniform, he radioed the Kiryat Arba security coordinator for a driver to Machpelah. Goldstein took with him a Galil assault rifle, wrapped in a blanket, with at least four clips of ammunition, each with thirty-five bullets. The summons of the *muezzin* to prayer at 4:52 A.M. had already attracted a large crowd of worshippers, perhaps as many as 500 men and 300 women, to Machpelah.

Entering the Isaac Hall shortly after 5:00 A.M., Goldstein stood behind a large marble pillar, waiting for worshippers to kneel to face Mecca in their *sojud* prayer. When they dropped to their knees, he began shooting. In ninety seconds of horrific havoc, he fired 108 bullets, killing twenty-nine Muslims and wounding 125. Then, while reloading, his rifle jammed. It was wrested from his hands and thrown aside. Knocked to the ground with a fire extinguisher, Goldstein was beaten to death with the metal poles that served as room dividers.

In his ammunition bag, Goldstein had left a letter titled "A Brief Confession from the Bridge of Life." If he should die, he had written, "may my death atone for all the sins and transgressions I have committed before you, and may you give me a place in Heaven and admit me to the hidden world of the righteous." It ended with the *Sh'ma* prayer and his closing words, "I shall fear not."

In her diary entry for that morning, a Kiryat Arba resident wrote, "Purim. We woke this morning to hear that someone from Kiryat Arba went into the Cave of the Fathers dressed in his army uniform and killed and injured scores of Arabs who were praying. . . . When I first heard what Baruch Goldstein had done and that he died for it, I burst out crying. I thought of his wife, whom I've been friends with for many years, and his four children." When Miriam Goldstein awakened that morning, her husband was already gone. She noticed that he had left his *talit* (prayer shawl) behind.

Baruch Goldstein's funeral was preceded by lengthy negotiations between his family and President Ezer Weizmann. Grieving family members requested burial in the ancient Jewish cemetery in Hebron, but the army refused permission. Chief of Staff Ehud Barak was concerned that infuriated Arabs would desecrate Goldstein's gravesite and mutilate his body. Kiryat Arba was chosen as the compromise location. The beginning

of the funeral procession, in Jerusalem, attracted thousands of religious mourners. According to *Yediot Aharonot*, they “turned into a single, collective personality, united by their burning hatred of the Israeli media, the wicked Israeli government and, above all else, of anyone who dared to speak against the murder.”

After nightfall, in a driving rain, Goldstein was buried near the entrance to Kiryat Arba, in a corner of the Meir Kahane Memorial Park. Rabbi Dov Lior, chief rabbi of Kiryat Arba, eulogized Goldstein as a holy man driven to desperation by government inaction against Arab terror. His tombstone would memorialize him as “a righteous and holy man . . . who devoted his soul to the Jews, Jewish religion and Jewish land. His hands are innocent, and his heart is pure.” He had died as “a martyr of God.” The cause of death, according to the Ministry of Interior, was “murder.” An Arab informant reported the names of Goldstein’s killers, but the state attorney decided not to charge anyone with the crime, a decision subsequently endorsed by the legal adviser to the Israeli government.

Speaking to the Knesset several days later, after waves of Palestinian rioting in which nineteen Arabs died and hundreds were injured, Prime Minister Rabin reviled Goldstein as “a villainous Jew,” a “horrible man from Hebron,” a “ Hamas Jew.” Goldstein, Rabin continued, “grew up in a swamp that has its sources in foreign lands as well as here. . . . To him and his ilk we say today: you are not part of the community of Israel. . . . You are not partners in the Zionist enterprise. You are a foreign implant. You are pernicious weeds. Sane Jewry vomits you from its midst. . . . You are a disgrace to Zionism and a blot on Judaism.”

Echoing Rabin, the Israeli press lacerated Goldstein as a deranged zealot who had shamed the entire nation. Allegations were widely circulated that Goldstein, while in the military, had refused to treat wounded Arabs. *Davar* journalist Amir Oren suggested that the reason why Goldstein had not been disciplined for his misbehavior was that he was “protected by highly placed people in senior ministries.” Nahum Barnea, writing in *Yediot Aharonot*, castigated government officials who explained the Machpelah massacre as the momentary derangement of a devoted doctor under “unbearable mental pressure.” Arabs, Barnea complained, “were made guilty for what [Goldstein] could not avoid doing.” Support for Goldstein in religious and settler communities, journalist Yuval Katz concluded, meant that “our supposed advancement in progressive beliefs and democracy have failed to affect the archaic forms of Jewish tribalism.” Writing in *Davar*, Teddy Preuss compared Goldstein to Dr. Josef Mengele at Auschwitz.

But in Kiryat Arba and Hebron, where Goldstein was deeply admired for his unstinting medical service and exemplary compassion, he was celebrated as “a righteous man. He sent us a beautiful gift for Purim. ‘God

will avenge his blood.” Addressing the Kiryat Arba municipality, Rabbi Levinger condemned the government of Israel for placing Goldstein under the “unbearable mental pressure” that propelled him to act.

Within days of the Machpelah massacre, the Rabin government appointed a commission of inquiry, chaired by High Court Judge Shamgar, who had presided over the investigation of the Jewish Underground a decade earlier. While it was hearing testimony, the government outlawed Rabbi Kahane’s Kach movement and its spin-off group Kahane Chai as terrorist organizations. Pressure mounted within Rabin’s Cabinet and from the Israeli left to evacuate the entire Hebron Jewish community.

Rabin, who twenty years earlier had pointedly expressed his opinion of settlers by labeling Gush Emunim “a cancer in the body of Israeli democracy,” was prepared to act against Hebron Jews. Attorney General Michael Ben-Yair advocated their evacuation, but Ehud Sprinzak, the prime minister’s academic adviser on right-wing terrorism, warned that evacuation “is liable to ignite a conflagration in the territories.” With the support of his Cabinet and Chief of Staff Barak, Rabin finally decided to remove yeshiva students from the Hebron Jewish quarter and expel the seven families who lived in trailers on Tel Rumeida, home to Kach activist Baruch Marzel. Pursuing a policy of guilt by association and collective punishment, the government justified removal as “a rescue operation in the interest of the settlers.”

The prospect of the removal of Jews from Hebron immediately provoked rabbinical fury. More than 1,000 rabbis signed a petition opposing evacuation. Rabbi Shlomo Goren, who had raised the Israeli flag outside Machpelah in June 1967, referred to “the criminal initiative to evacuate Hebron.” He issued a ruling prohibiting expulsions from Jewish settlements in the Land of Israel:

According to the *Halakha* [Jewish law], the meaning of the destruction of Hebron, God forbid, . . . is like the killing of a people. . . . This is why we have to give our life in the struggle against this vicious plan of the government of Israel . . . and be ready to die rather than allow the destruction of Hebron.

Other prominent rabbis pledged their support. The rabbinical leaders of the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva in Jerusalem and the Bnei Akiva youth movement, the educational incubators for the settler movement, instructed soldiers that any orders to evacuate Jews from Hebron were illegal and should be disobeyed. Rabbi Eliezer Waldman, head of the Kiryat Arba yeshiva, alleged that because the Rabin government was “born in sin”—lacking, by then, a Jewish majority in the Knesset—it had “no right to go against any Jewish settlement.” Kiryat Arba Chief Rabbi Dov Lior issued a special ruling that Jews should be prepared to sacrifice their lives for Hebron.

A month after the Goldstein massacre, while the Tel Rumeida evacuation was under consideration, a group of rabbis met again in Kiryat Arba. Deliberating whether to issue a *halachic* ruling forbidding soldiers to obey evacuation orders, they finally decided, "It is a duty to reject an order to evacuate any settlement in the Land of Israel." According to former Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapira, who presided over the meeting, "The decision of the secular regime cannot oblige a Jew when it runs contrary to *halacha* [Jewish law]."

These sharp challenges to government authority enraged Rabin and provoked national furor. But the ominous prospect of violent encounters between Jewish settlers and soldiers proved, in the end, to be a deterrent to evacuation. Despite his evident loathing for the settlers and their rabbis, Rabin stepped back from the brink and permitted the Tel Rumeida residents, none of whom were charged with any criminal acts, to remain in their homes.

The Shamgar Commission report, issued in June, concluded that Goldstein had acted alone and in "complete secrecy." (Not even his wife had advance knowledge of his intentions.) The commission noted that ever since the Beit Hadassah murders in 1980, as "a result of the security situation in the area," not only army personnel but also Kiryat Arba and Hebron residents had been permitted to carry weapons. "Moving around [Hebron] without a weapon," it acknowledged, "created a personal risk." Neither political leaders nor security forces, commissioners agreed, could have been expected to anticipate Goldstein's unimaginable assault. Acting as he did, "he took full advantage of the prestige and trust that he had acquired while serving as a doctor and reserve officer."

The commission cited intelligence reports expressing heightened concern about "an attack by Arabs against Jews" in Hebron. Tension among Arabs ran high, stoked by the agreement negotiated between the military governor and the *waqf* apportioning separate prayer times in the Isaac Hall for the evening when Purim and Ramadan prayer services coincided. Their angry shouts of "Kill the Jews" during the Jewish service had been sufficiently alarming for reinforcements to be called in from the military and border police. But on the morning of February 25, the Machpelah guard patrol was short staffed because the expected police contingent was late in arriving. The menacing intelligence reports, Muslim fury, and inadequate police coverage framed the disaster waiting to happen. In the commission's judgment, Goldstein

was haunted by a siege mentality, seeing a danger for the existence of the Jewish people and feeling that only an extraordinary act would stop what he considered a most serious deterioration in the nation's condition and the lack of response to the increasing and worsening acts of terror. . . . He must have

come to the conclusion that he should carry out an act exceptional in its severity and extremism, which would stop the political process he considered most fatal. . . . In a leaflet signed by him, Goldstein said, "It is time to wake up from sleep and say enough."

Doing what he believed to be necessary to prevent a massacre of Jews, Goldstein had made the fateful decision to massacre Muslims. The commission sharply condemned his "base and murderous act," which it labeled "one of the harshest expressions of the Jewish-Arab conflict." Despite testimony from Arabs who tried to implicate other settlers and soldiers in Goldstein's action, the Shamgar Commission decisively concluded that Goldstein had acted alone.

Testimony from two Israeli witnesses had significant impact on commission members. Central Command General Danny Yatom reminded them, "The majority of the settler population is quite disciplined, even in the very difficult conditions of being under repeated attack." Any illegal actions, he asserted, "happened in almost every, if not all cases, after Jews got killed by terrorists." Mayor Zvi Katzover of Kiryat Arba described "this atmosphere that our blood is expendable, that Arabs can massacre us, shoot at us, throw rocks at us," as "totally unbearable." No wonder, he continued, that someone would conclude, "I had enough, I cannot tolerate this any more, I prefer to commit some act that will awaken the army and the government and get them to do what they are supposed to do." Katzover pressed the commission to discover "why they are abandoning our lives."

In a section of its report that received little attention at a time when few Israelis cared to look beyond settler violence for explanations, the commission underscored the testimony from Yatom and Katzover: "Since the outbreak of the intifada, this [Jewish settler] population has lived under the shadow of constant physical threat." Indeed, life for Jewish settlers had become (borrowing Katzover's word) "unbearable." With exceedingly strong language, the commission concluded, "The [Israeli] authorities' helplessness in enforcing the law is apt to make the residents feel abandoned and encourages them to take the law into their own hands." There had been no effective response to the waves of firebomb and hand-grenade attacks, assaults, knifings, and shootings in the territories during the intifada or to dozens of murders and nearly 4,000 injuries. It was a sharp rebuke to the Israeli government and military for tolerating five years of unremitting violence against Jewish settlers without effectively punishing lawless Palestinians.

During commission hearings and deliberations, while the government threatened to evacuate Tel Rumeida, Hebron became a rallying point for right-wing activists who came to demonstrate their support for the settlers.

Goldstein's grave in Kiryat Arba became a pilgrimage site where all-night Torah study sessions were held. Students from the Orthodox Bar-Ilan University organized "solidarity weekends" for prayer, study, and support. Among them was a law and computer science student, the son of Yemenite parents from Herzliya. He had attended religious schools and served in the *hesder* program, which combined yeshiva study and military service. In Hebron he hoped to identify sympathizers who would be willing to defend settlers, by force if necessary, if the government tried to evict them. Attending Goldstein's funeral, he "saw the love they had for him." He recalled, "That's when I had the idea that it's necessary to take Rabin down." His name was Yigal Amir. On November 4, 1995, he assassinated Yitzhak Rabin.

In their search of Amir's room after the assassination, police found a copy of a memorial volume that had been published on the first anniversary of Goldstein's death. Its ambiguously inflammatory title, *Baruch HaGever*, might be translated as "Baruch the Man," "Baruch the Saint," or "Blessed Be the Man." By then, according to Ehud Sprinzak, "an entire Baruch Goldstein cult had been formed." His memory served as "the rallying point of the disabled Kach movement" and for a "surprisingly large" number of Israelis (actually a few dozen activists and several hundred supporters) who "had come to consider Goldstein a holy man and an exemplary figure."

Baruch HaGever was edited by Michael Ben-Horin, a Golan Heights settler and Kach activist who was one of the founders of "the State of Judea," presented as a symbolic alternative to Israeli rule in the territories. An essay written by Rabbi Yitzhak Ginzburg, militant head of the Tomb of Joseph yeshiva in Nablus, praised Goldstein for his virtuous attempt to fulfill a *halachic* mandate by saving Jewish lives. Revenge, the rabbi wrote, "is the return of the individual and the nation to believe in themselves." Jews who felt "excitement and encouragement" after the massacre were those "whose flesh is still alive in spite of the intense bleeding caused by all the stabbing wounds against it." Those who knew Goldstein "felt that he acted out of his Jewish being"; he was an "exemplary man" who sacrificed his own life for *kiddush haShem* (sanctification of God's name).

Other contributors to *Baruch HaGever* affirmed the virtue of revenge. For Rabbi David Cohen, a yeshiva teacher in the settlement of Kfar Tapuach, "Revenge is not left to God alone. The revenge executed by the people of Israel should be understood as God's revenge since the people of Israel is God's representative in the world." Rabbi Ido Elba of Kiryat Arba, serving a jail sentence for supplying arms and explosives during his army service to a small group of settlers who planned revenge against local Arabs, insisted that the commandment "thou shalt not kill" did not apply to a Jew who killed a Gentile. "An offensive war, launched in order to kill Gentiles

for fear they may attack the Jews, is a legitimate option. . . . This is the ruling regarding the war against Amalek."

Publication of *Baruch HaGever*, Sprinzak suggested, marked "the maturation of Israel's small Kahanist counterculture." Benjamin Ze'ev Kahane, the murdered rabbi's son and leader of the tiny Kahane Chai splinter movement, argued in the memorial volume that "the real war is not with the Arabs but with the *Hellenized Jews*" who were "scared by the Gentiles and attached to distorted Western ideas." But Kahane's declaration of a "cultural war" between the "Jewish idea" and "the yoke of democracy" hardly was a call to action. Conceding that this radical right subculture was "politically insignificant," Sprinzak nonetheless branded it as "an aggressive, radical spearhead" that "brought the legitimacy crisis between the settlers and the Labor government to its peak."

The Rabin government was unrelenting in its determination to punish those who would honor Goldstein's memory. During Ido Elba's trial, the judge ruled that his essay in *Baruch HaGever* constituted "illegal incitement." Michael Ben-Horin, editor of the volume, was also indicted for incitement. In November 1995, shortly after Rabin's assassination, Ben-Horin was sentenced in Jerusalem Magistrate's Court to eight months in prison for editing a book that constituted "incitement to racism and support of a terror organization."

In Kiryat Arba, the municipal council designated Goldstein's grave site as a cemetery. A year after his death, the municipality obtained a permit from the Civil Administration to build a memorial there. To accommodate visitors, sidewalks, a basin with running water (for ritual purification), a cabinet for prayer books, pedestals for candles, and electric lighting were installed. Incensed by these improvements, the Knesset passed a law prohibiting monuments in memory of terrorists. Over the objections of Goldstein family members, the Supreme Court ordered the removal of the cosmetic alterations to Goldstein's grave site. Bulldozers guarded by soldiers and police came to Kiryat Arba to demolish the plaza surrounding the grave, provoking a pitched battle with Goldstein's supporters. Yisrael Goldstein prostrated himself on his son's grave, sobbing, "He was a righteous man. He gave his life to sanctify God's name. He was there that morning to prevent the slaughter that would certainly have taken place."

Even before the Purim massacre, Rabin's adviser Ehud Sprinzak had urged an "iron-fist" policy against "extremist elements within the radical right." The foremost proponent of linkage between Jewish settlement activity and a spreading Israeli crisis of legitimacy, Sprinzak—like Rabin—did not recognize any Zionist legitimacy outside the true faith of Labor Zionism. He borrowed the pejorative concept of a "radical right," formulated by American social scientists during the 1950s to explain the

political ascent of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, to castigate the settler movement for its messianic fanaticism. In *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right*, published in 1991, Sprinzak had implicated the entire Zionist political right—from Jabotinsky Revisionists through Begin's Likud to Gush Emunim and Rabbi Kahane's Kach movement—for attempting to subvert Israeli democracy. In Sprinzak's judgment, they shared a "conspiracy mentality" that united "ultranationalism, militarism, ethnocentrism, and religiosity" into a volatile blend of biblical fanaticism and even terrorism.

The Goldstein massacre, followed a year and a half later by the Rabin assassination, reframed Sprinzak's understanding of "violence and extremism in Israeli politics." He now located its origin in the *Altalena* episode, just after Israeli independence, when Menachem Begin's Irgun attempted to unload weapons from a ship off the shore of Tel Aviv for its beleaguered fighters in Jerusalem. Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, fearing a military putsch, ordered an attack on the *Altalena*, resulting in the deaths of nineteen Israeli fighters. To Sprinzak, writing after Rabin's assassination, Goldstein and the settlers represented no less menacing a right-wing challenge to Zionist legitimacy than had the Irgun nearly half a century earlier.

In *Brother Against Brother*, published in 1999, Sprinzak rejected Rabin's explanation of Goldstein as a solitary deranged individual, a "crazy loner." Not only had the Kiryat Arba doctor, according to Sprinzak, "planned the attack well in advance," but he conducted it "within an elaborate ideological and political framework that fully justified anti-Arab terrorism." To "many of Goldstein's close friends in Kiryat Arba," who were also followers of Rabbi Kahane, this "fundamentalist and messianic doctor" had sanctified God's name and committed an act of *messirut hanefesh*, total devotion to the cause. Goldstein's "long and close association with Kach" gave his action "a political meaning." Not merely a one-time act of violence by a solitary individual, it became to Sprinzak "a collective act by proxy, a colossal demonstration of political violence expressing a crisis of an entire fundamentalist milieu."

Indeed, Sprinzak wrote, "it is not an exaggeration to describe the Hebron massacre as the most extreme reaction of these messianic Jews to the political threat posed to their theological convictions and collective existence" by the Oslo peace process. Furthermore, he noted, Yigal Amir "admired Baruch Goldstein, who also acted on his own." So the web of complicity was tightened by Sprinzak to connect two "messianic Jews," one the murderer of twenty-nine Muslims and the other the assassin of a Jewish prime minister. It did not seem to matter that there was no evidence that they knew each other or had ever met or even communicated.

In his sweeping assertion of guilt by association, Sprinzak implicated Goldstein in a broader messianic movement that left Jewish settlers vir-

tually indistinguishable from Muslim terrorists. He reminded readers that “the Middle East”—not mentioning Islam by name—had recently witnessed “a dramatic rise in religious radicalism and extremist fundamentalism,” from the Khomeini revolution in Iran and the assassination of President Sadat in Egypt to the ascent of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestinian society. Until the 1980s, Israel had been the solitary exception to this pattern of “religious violence.” But the actions of “thousands of young yeshiva students” and “young messianic settlers of Gush Emunim” exposed the Jewish state to “the type of religious terrorism” that had previously been confined to Muslim societies. For Sprinzak, Goldstein and Amir became its nefarious Israeli exemplars.

Sprinzak claimed to be searching for “the political and cultural conditions . . . within which a large number of Israeli Jews have come to consider violence and assassination legitimate political means.” He cited Goldstein to illustrate “how domestic terrorist interaction between Muslim and Jewish religious extremists” could undermine the Oslo peace process, to which Sprinzak was strongly committed. Indeed, Goldstein was a harbinger of “the vast importance that Jewish extremism and violence will have in shaping the future of the Middle East.” Framing his political criticism as social science truth, Sprinzak provided an academic rationale for undermining the legitimacy of the settlement movement.

It is certainly true that the election of a Labor government in 1992, followed by the Oslo accords, had sent clear signals that Israel was preparing to retreat from Judea and Samaria. This political shift was shocking, deeply upsetting, and ominously threatening for settlers and their political allies. It may even have precipitated a “theological crisis” among certain rabbis on the extreme right, as Sprinzak alleged. But that is a long way from concluding that Baruch Goldstein’s massacre in Machpelah expressed “messianism in crisis.” Converting the solitary perpetrator of murder into the representative of a far larger group, indistinguishable from Islamic terrorism, Sprinzak indicted an inflated messianic “movement” for crimes that only one of its purported members had committed.

To Sprinzak, Goldstein “had undergone since Oslo a personal and theological crisis,” slowly leading him “to the fatalistic conclusion that unless stopped by a most dramatic act, something that would please God and shake the foundations of the earth, the peace process could disconfirm the dream of redemption.” The problem with this hypothesis is that there was not a shred of evidence to support it—and abundant evidence to the contrary. As Sprinzak acknowledged, the Shamgar Commission did not speculate about “the relationship between failed messianism and violence”—doubtless because it was not considered relevant to understanding Goldstein’s action.

Instead, the commission identified “the lack of [government] response to the increasing and worsening acts of [Palestinian] terror” as the likeliest precipitant for Goldstein’s decision to act. “According to his understanding,” the commission continued, “only a serious blow . . . would stop the [terrorism] process.” The absence of adequate law enforcement by the Israeli government, the commission strongly suggested, had prepared the way for tragedy.

Sprinzak insisted that there were “many signs,” beginning with Rabbi Kahane’s assassination in 1990 and increasing after the Oslo accords, that Goldstein had “started to step slowly into a desperate messianic defiance.” There is no doubt that Rabbi Kahane’s assassination had been a painful shock to Goldstein. Certainly the brutal murder of his friend Pinchas Lapid in December 1993 upset him deeply. But the immediate context for his decision to kill was neither of these terrorist acts against Jews, which had occurred years or months earlier. Framing Goldstein’s decision to act was the ominous report by the Israeli military to the Kiryat Arba Council, just days before Purim, of imminent Arab violence against Hebron Jews. Yet as late as the evening before the massacre when Goldstein went to Machpelah, not even his wife had detected any signs of imminent peril in her husband’s behavior.

If Goldstein needed any confirmation of impending danger, he certainly received it when he attended the *Megillah* reading. The inflamed crowd of Muslims in Machpelah screaming “*Itbach el Yahud*” alarmed and enraged him, prompting him to depart in tears, saying, “I cannot tolerate this anymore.” Under these circumstances, there is no need to search for sophisticated social science explanations, borrowed from a different time and culture, of “an elaborate ideological and political framework,” “a crisis of an entire fundamentalist milieu,” or the “extreme reaction . . . [of] messianic Jews to the political threat posed to their theological convictions.” In very specific circumstances during February 1994—including explicit military warnings of imminent violence, coupled with recommendations for appropriate medical preparations and quite audible Muslim cries to murder Jews—Goldstein (alerted by the local Israeli military command) had every reason to expect an imminent Arab attack in Hebron.

To any member of the Kiryat Arba–Hebron community, such warnings instantly triggered memories of Tarpat, the horrific slaughter of 1929. Those memories had framed the reestablishment of a Jewish presence in Hebron in 1968, the reclaiming of Jewish property seized by local Arabs, and the frequently reiterated trope—so clearly articulated by Miriam Levinger and Sarah Nachshon—linking memory and return. The threat of an imminent massacre, combined with the refusal of the Israeli government and military to proactively protect the settlers, surely stirred in Goldstein the fear and fury that framed his decision to kill.

Attempting to locate Goldstein's action in the larger context of Jewish history, Bar-Ilan University historian Elliott Horowitz explored the textual and historical linkage of Purim to Jewish violence. Engaged in writing about the history of Purim violence at the very moment of Goldstein's murderous rampage, Horowitz described his own response: "The realization . . . that there was a clear connection between past Purims and the present one was both exhilarating and disturbing." Horowitz located that "clear connection" in the injunction in Torah to "blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." (Haman, the villain of the Purim story, was referred to in the Book of Esther as Amalek's descendant.) He described a "legacy of Jewish violence" on Purim that wound its way through medieval and modern Jewish history, climaxing in the ghastly Goldstein massacre.

Horowitz's "clear connection" between these events was, however, extremely murky. In ancient Persia, according to the Book of Esther, "the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, slaughtering and destroying them, and did what they would unto those who hated them." But Horowitz presented little evidence to support his claim of repetitive Jewish violence on Purim—the "tradition" that presumably framed Goldstein's act. Aside from an alleged "great slaughter" of local Christians by Galilee Jews after the Persian invasion of Jerusalem in 614 C.E., which other scholars believed to be dubious, evidence for repetitive Jewish violence on Purim through the centuries was exceedingly meager: occasional episodes of stone throwing, the spilling of "rancid oil" on a Jewish convert, mockery of the Christian cross, and a total of three recorded Purim deaths inflicted by Jews in a span of more than 1,000 years.

Horowitz also claimed to discover contemporary antecedents in Hebron for Goldstein's action. But his evidence for a "legacy" of Purim violence in Hebron was even less compelling. In 1981, Jews from Kiryat Arba came to Beit Hadassah to celebrate Purim with its isolated residents. Their enthusiastic dancing apparently damaged the roof of a downstairs upholstery shop owned by a local Arab. Over the next several days, the store was pillaged, but its Arab owner felt intimidated from lodging a complaint. After a police investigation, the state attorney's office dismissed claims against the Kiryat Arba celebrants. But a government commission that subsequently investigated Israeli violence on the West Bank found it "highly disturbing" that the military governor of Hebron had instructed the local police commander not to investigate the incident further.

Then, during the annual Purim parade in Hebron five years later, a Jewish settler placed a *keffiyah* on an effigy of Haman, infuriating local Arabs. "It is not unlikely," Horowitz opined (unsupported by any confirming evidence), that Baruch Goldstein "participated in the Purim

parade of 1986"—as if his presence then explained his actions eight years later. In their Purim parade in 1989, Hebron settlers were reported to have carried a skeleton with a *keffiyah* on its head and a noose around its neck. Some Jewish children brandished toy rifles, "which they pointed menacingly at their Palestinian counterparts." A year later, parade participants were "provocatively dressed" as Arabs, while one wore a "Peace Now" shirt and a *keffiyah* "to suggest an inner affinity" between them. Such was the "legacy" of Jewish violence that Horowitz discovered on Purim in Hebron before 1994.

Yet Horowitz, quoting the Hebrew University philosopher Samuel Hugo Bergman (a founder of Brit Shalom, the tiny pre-World War II Jewish peace group in Palestine), concluded that Purim's "continued observance is best understood as a consequence of 'the deep decay of our people.'" His evidence, however, points to a contrary conclusion. As Israeli writer Hillel Halkin suggested in a stinging review of his book, "If there is any [Purim] legacy at all, it is the legacy of Jewish *non-violence*." Indeed, it seems likely that Purim best served Jewish communities during their many centuries of oppression as a safety valve to redirect any fantasies of violence into harmless parades and joyful, occasionally intoxicated, revelry. "What is unusual about Jews," Halkin tellingly observed, "is that, for much of their history, the resort to violence *was* repressed."

Baruch Goldstein's massacre, which Elyakim Haetzni labeled "a terrible, despicable bloodbath," was a dreadful exception to the normal harmless fun of Purim celebration in contemporary Hebron no less than throughout Jewish history. Had Goldstein lived to be tried in an Israeli court, he surely would have been found guilty of twenty-nine murders despite any extenuating circumstances that might have been offered in justification. No available claim—whether provocation, self-defense, temporary insanity, or an impaired understanding of right and wrong—could have mitigated his accountability for his rampage. To be sure, the Israeli military, which bore responsibility for the safety of the Hebron community, had been alerted to the heightened possibility of danger. But Goldstein's belief, however deeply held, that he was taking preventive action to protect his community could not be justified without tangible evidence of an imminent attack on Jews by the Muslims who had gathered for prayer that morning in Isaac Hall.

In the end, Goldstein bore sole responsibility for his decision to kill as many Muslims as possible. He acted alone, not as the agent or exemplar of a movement. The humane compassion for which he was revered made his aberrational behavior in Machpelah all the more confounding. His confessional letter offered no explanation or justification for his action. He asked only that his death atone for "all the sins and transgressions" that he had committed before God. Did he believe that the murder he

was prepared to commit was sinful yet necessary? Perhaps. But we cannot know.

Certainly there was ample evidence, gathered by the Israeli military and confirmed by the Shamgar Commission, that the Hebron Jewish community confronted serious, even imminent, danger as the Purim holiday approached. It was no less true, as Kiryat Arba mayor Katzover testified and the commission reiterated, that Hebron Jews “lived under the shadow of constant physical threat,” their lives had become “unbearable,” and—most tellingly—“the authorities’ helplessness in enforcing the law is apt to make the residents feel abandoned and accordingly encourages them to take the law into their own hands.” In the two years following Oslo, nine Israelis were killed in terrorist attacks in Hebron alone, seventeen were injured by gunfire, there were ten attempted stabbings, and thirty bombs were planted. Feeling abandoned by the government and anticipating an even worse tragedy imminently, Baruch Goldstein acted.

To calumny Goldstein as a “ Hamas Jew ” who was “ not part of the community of Israel ” (Rabin), as the violent exemplar of “ messianism in crisis ” (Sprinzak), or as the modern incarnation of a “ legacy of Jewish violence ” that extended back to the Book of Esther (Horowitz) hardly begins to explain why he did what he did. Nor can we ever know whether Goldstein’s murderous action saved many—or any—Jewish lives at the cost of twenty-nine Arab deaths.

There is no doubt, however, that the Oslo accords, so rapturously praised at the time of their signing as the harbinger of peace between Israelis and Palestinians, precipitated the most prolonged and deadly eruption of terrorist violence that Israel had ever confronted. Signed in violation of Rabin’s preelection pledges and implemented by the decision of a Jewish minority in the Knesset, the agreement provoked a sharp response from the political right, which challenged the legitimacy of the Rabin government for acting without a Jewish majority.

Writing after Oslo in *Nekuda*, the settlers’ newspaper, Dan Be’eri lamented, “ Visionaries have seen their vision torn asunder before their eyes. ” Elyakim Haetzni, who developed a theory of civil disobedience under which settlers had the right to refuse to obey any orders commanding them to abandon their homes in Judea and Samaria, insisted, “ We are loyal to the covenant with God, we are not loyal to Oslo. ” Goldstein’s friend Moshe Feiglin, a right-wing political activist who organized protests against Oslo under the banner of *Zo Artzeinu* (“ This Is Our Land ”), believed that Goldstein had acted to avert “ a clear and palpable danger ” to the Hebron Jewish community. He acted “ like a real Gentile, with no inhibitions, . . . slaughtering the ‘ sheepish ’ image we had worked so hard to develop. ”

Baruch Goldstein’s decision to kill as many Hebron Muslims as he could remains the solitary instance of mass murder by a Jewish settler

amid incessant, ever more horrific, episodes of Palestinian terrorism. Four months later, in July, seventeen-year-old Sarit Prigal was killed in a drive-by shooting at the entrance to Kiryat Arba. In October, Hamas blew up a Tel Aviv bus, killing twenty-two Israelis. In January, one month after the Nobel award ceremony at which Rabin, Peres, and Arafat received their peace prizes, came another devastating terrorist attack on an Israeli bus, followed that summer by two more. In between, in March, Hebron yeshiva student Nahum Hoss was murdered in a terrorist ambush near the Glass junction in downtown Hebron, where Pinhas Lapid and his son had died.

By then, Goldstein had become the scapegoat for those who were determined to blame Israeli settlers—and religious “messianism”—for Palestinian terrorism. His “act of terror,” writes Geoffrey Aronson, “was an extreme example of the dangers posed by Israeli settlers to Palestinians living in the occupied territories.” In *The End of Days*, Gershom Gorenberg’s critical analysis of Jewish fundamentalism, Goldstein was presented as the spiritual accomplice of members of the Jewish Underground who, a decade earlier, had planned to destroy the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. According to Gorenberg, they shared a common purpose: “Strike at a holy spot, end a peace process, put redemption back on track.” A nihilist at his core, Goldstein chose “to destroy himself and others, to be Samson.”

To anthropologist Robert Paine, Goldstein was guilty of “murder-as-desecration.” Hebron Arabs were understandably infuriated by Israeli disregard for their exclusive claim to Machpelah. As one local Muslim told the Shamgar Commission, “According to our faith, according to our religion, the Haram belongs only to the Moslems and not to the Jews.” Not only was Goldstein’s assault on Purim, but it came during Ramadan, the holiest season for Muslims. To Paine, “a holy space was invaded and the righteous violated by an infidel.” Reading Goldstein’s action as the reenactment of a primal biblical struggle, Paine wondered, “Was it a fratricide with deep echoes: a son of Isaac killing sons of Ishmael” in the burial place of their common ancestral father?

To Goldstein’s defenders, however, the Kiryat Arba doctor “must have felt that he had to take the defense of his fellow Jews into his own hands.” Convinced that the Israeli government would not protect settlers against an impending attack, he “preempted a vast bloodbath of Jews being prepared for Purim morning.” Neither a Samson nor an inflamed “messianist,” he had acted to save Jewish lives, as he had so often done at great personal risk as a doctor. Goldstein, Kiryat Arba journalist Gary Cooperberg suggested, committed “a desperate act, not only designed to wake up a complacent people, but to physically prevent an imminent large scale Arab massacre of Jews.”

When Israeli film director Ehud Levanon journeyed from Tel Aviv to what he snidely called “the quasi-independent Jewish State” of Hebron in 1996, he was sharply rebuked for attempting to link Goldstein to Rabin’s assassin. “Yigal Amir can’t be compared with Goldstein,” a teenage Jewish girl admonished him. “While they are both religious, Goldstein is righteous, he is a saint.” Amir, after all, had killed a Jew, but “Goldstein killed Arabs!” At Goldstein’s grave, her father told Levanon, “Every father would have wanted a son like Goldstein.”

Even sixty-five years after Tarpat, warnings of impending Arab violence could only have triggered palpable foreboding among Hebron Jews. Once decimated, then obliterated, and finally rebuilt amid unrelenting Arab hostility, with so many of its people wounded and killed in terrorist attacks, threats to the security and survival of the community were not taken lightly by its members. This could hardly exonerate Baruch Goldstein for his murderous rampage. But it was no small measure of the precariousness of Jewish life in Hebron, and the abject failure of the Israeli government to protect its own citizens, that a compassionate doctor who had earned the deepest admiration of his community finally felt compelled by government indecision and inaction to commit such an appalling act.

In a gesture of compassion after the Machpelah massacre, an elderly Hebron Jew, a survivor of the Arab rampage in 1929, visited one of Goldstein’s wounded victims in the hospital. “It closed the circle,” he said sadly.



Endurance

Baruch Goldstein's carnage reverberated with fateful consequences for the Hebron Jewish community. Although it deflected Prime Minister Rabin's threat to evacuate Tel Rumeida, widespread allegations of settler guilt by association placed the entire community under siege from hostile critics at home and abroad. *Me'arat HaMachpelah* was closed for eight months for repairs. When it reopened, with stringent security measures in place, new government and military rules imposed a vastly disproportionate allocation of time and space for worship. Muslims were granted exclusive rights to the Isaac Hall, the largest and historically most venerated chamber, except for ten days each year (for Jewish holidays and special *Shabbat* celebrations) when Jews alone could pray there. A harsh punishment, it effectively held Hebron Jews collectively responsible for Goldstein's act.

The election of Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister in 1996 brought to power a sharp critic of the Oslo accords who had presciently predicted an increase in terrorism following Israeli concessions to the Palestinian Authority. "Should terrorism persist," he warned, "we will not continue the political process." No longer would terrorism be considered the "price of peace." Netanyahu's position on Hebron was clear: "We are in Hebron by right." He reassured Jewish residents that Hebron would remain under the exclusive control of the Israeli army.

That September, pursuant to an agreement with the Palestinian Authority, the Netanyahu government authorized the opening of a new entrance to the ancient Hasmonean tunnel adjacent to the Western Wall in Jerusalem. (In return, Muslim prayer space was expanded into Solomon's

stables, beneath the Temple Mount.) Seizing the opportunity to blame Israel for intruding on Muslim “holy” space, Yasir Arafat responded to the tunnel opening with a call for violent retaliation against those who desecrated “holy shrines” in Jerusalem. Although there was nothing sacrosanct about the tunnel or its new opening (to which Arafat had consented), it served as a convenient pretext for yet another eruption of Palestinian violence. During the orchestrated mayhem that followed, fifteen Israelis and nearly sixty Palestinians were killed.

Sharply criticized by his political opponents at home for undermining the peace process, by the international media for his provocation, and by the UN Security Council, Netanyahu was subjected to intense American pressure to become more conciliatory. In January 1997, he signed the Hebron Protocol, with deleterious consequences for the Jewish community. Hebron would be divided into Arab and Israeli zones, with redeployment of the Israeli military from more than 80 percent of the city. Within the tiny Jewish zone and only there, the Israeli government retained “all powers and responsibilities for internal security and public order.” But the Palestinian police were granted authority over several Jewish sites in the Arab zone, including Elonei Mamre, the traditional location of Abraham’s hospitality to the visiting angels, and the old Slobodka yeshiva building. “Free, unimpeded and secure access” to Jews was guaranteed—on paper.

The Temporary International Presence in the City of Hebron, comprising soldiers from Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Switzerland, was established to monitor Hebron life, enhance the feelings of security among Arab residents, and ensure stability. In theory, at least, both sides expressed their commitment to the unity of Hebron with the understanding that the division of responsibility for security would not divide the city.

Prime Minister Netanyahu insisted, “We are not leaving Hebron. . . . We do not want to remove the Jewish community from Hebron. We want to preserve and consolidate it.” But Hebron Jews were stunned. When an Israeli officer handed over the keys to the Hebron Military Compound to his Palestinian counterpart, they were, by the tacit consent of their own government, returned to the ghetto. The barricades and chain fences that separated 600 Israelis from more than 100,000 Palestinians proved no obstacle to stones, firebombs, and bullets. Israeli soldiers were under strict orders not to respond to Palestinian intrusions into the Jewish zone. As a soldier revealed during a radio interview, “It is forbidden to react. If [soldiers] react, they are liable to be put on trial.” While Palestinians were unrestrained by their police, the power of the Israeli army to protect Hebron Jews was severely circumscribed.

The tiny Jewish zone included access to *Me’arat HaMachpelah*, with a road link to Kiryat Arba; the Avraham Avinu quarter, with its apartment buildings, offices, and military facilities; and a cluster of nearby residen-

tial and educational buildings, including Beit Romano, Beit Hadassah, and Beit HaShisha (“House of the Six”), built to commemorate the Jews who were murdered outside Beit Hadassah in 1980. Up the hill past Beit Hadassah was Tel Rumeida, with its small trailer compound, the old Jewish cemetery, and the nearby ancient tombs of Ruth and Yishai. Everywhere else in Hebron was off limits to Jews.

Even before the agreement could be implemented, Noam Friedman, an Israeli soldier with a history of mental problems, opened fire in the crowded Hebron vegetable market. Intending to derail the agreement, he shot two rounds from his assault rifle, wounding six Palestinians before Israeli soldiers disarmed him. Chaos erupted as some Palestinians tried to flee while others attempted to assault Friedman. Israeli and Palestinian officials moved quickly to stifle further violence, and the settler community disavowed Friedman’s action. But Hebron remained a tinderbox ready to explode.

Several months after the signing of the Hebron accords, the Israeli Government Press Office released a list of Palestinian violations of the new agreement. Although the Palestinian Authority had deployed nearly four times the number of police (400) allowed under the accords, they “repeatedly failed to contain Palestinian rioters who surged toward the Jewish Quarter,” throwing stones as they went. In contravention of the accords, Palestinian police had repeatedly entered the Jewish zone. Forbidden to arrest Israelis, they had nonetheless done so on several occasions—in places where they were not permitted to be, armed with weapons they were not permitted to possess.

Despite the voluntary departure from the Jewish zone of many Palestinian residents who accused Israel of “transfer” by intimidation, Arabs still vastly outnumbered Jews there (by a ratio of ten to one). But no Jews were permitted to live in the Arab zone that comprised the major part of the city, notwithstanding the presence of Jewish-owned property there. Any rectification of the population imbalance in the Jewish zone was thwarted by strict Israeli government limitations on building construction, expansion of existing dwelling units, purchases of houses from Arab sellers, and access to Jewish property taken from Jordan in 1967 by the Israeli Custodian of Alien Property. Even within the narrow confines of the Jewish zone, where Jews retained limited habitation rights, the Israeli government gave every indication that the future of the Hebron Jewish community remained constricted and precarious.

Amid the political turbulence swirling through Hebron after the accord was signed, the Jewish community confronted sharp criticism from an unexpected source. Some pre-1929 Jewish residents of Hebron and the descendants of others, calling themselves “The Old Hebronites,” published a petition in Israeli newspapers calling for “peace for the city, peace for

the land." Predominantly Sephardic Jews, they rejected as "totally false and misleading" the claim of new settlers to speak for the old *yishuv*. Indeed, they proclaimed, "they and their way of life are totally alien to the culture and way of life of the true Hebronite Jews, who throughout the generations formed a heritage of peace between peoples and understanding between religions."

Condemning the possession of former Jewish property by Jewish settlers as "an act of robbery," the "Old Hebronites" called on the Israeli government to remove them "before they succeed in exploding the peace process." No one, the petitioners complained, "granted them the right that is not theirs, to be the heirs of our fathers." Yona Rochlin, the forty-five-year-old resident of a moshav near Tel Aviv who spearheaded the petition campaign, asserted, "I don't want my son to die on my grandfather's grave in Hebron." To the settlers' commemoration of Tarpat, she offered a countermemory: they "have taken two days [in 1929] and erased 500 years." The way of life in Hebron, she insisted, had once been "a way of peace."

From the respected Shneerson family, Yair Keidan denounced the settlers as "lunatics, radical fanatics." The new settlers, complained another refugee from the old community, had "invaded our property." Two prominent journalists, Haim Hanegbi, grandson of Hebron's Sephardic chief rabbi before 1929, and Amnon Bierman, from the distinguished Sarfati family, led a delegation of twenty-five Jews whose families had left in 1929 back to Hebron. There they received a cordial welcome from the Palestinian mayor and his council before touring the city with the police commissioner of the Palestinian Authority.

Their blistering attack exposed a deep fissure, still evident after nearly seventy years, between two communities of Hebron Jews. The new (predominantly Ashkenazi and strongly Zionist) settlers had claimed to speak in the name of the old (predominantly Sephardic and anti-Zionist) *yishuv*. They justified their presence in Hebron as a "return," with all the moral weight that claim had carried after the Israeli victory in 1967. They had done what their predecessors had been unable—or, for reasons rooted in their horrific experience or in patterns of cultural deference, unwilling—to do, namely, rebuild a viable Jewish community in Hebron.

To members of the exiled families who complained that the return to Hebron after 1967 was "political," the tenacity of the new settlers underscored their own failure to return, rebuild, and remain. They reminisced about the "good old days" of Arab-Jewish amity in Hebron, before the disruptive arrival of Ashkenazi "Zionists" (actually, westernized Slobodka yeshiva students with little affinity for Zionism). In their memory, the peaceful cohabitation of Hebron Muslims and Jews for "500 years" overshadowed the horror and devastation of "two days" in 1929. A

measure of harmony between the old *yishuv* and new settlers was finally restored when the *Kollelot Hasefardim Magen Avot*, considered the legal successor to the Hebron Sephardic community, granted power of attorney to the new settlers to inhabit former Jewish property.

Despite the disproportionate partition of the city, some local Palestinians remained fiercely opposed to the presence of Jews anywhere in Hebron. On the evening of August 21, 1998, Rabbi Shlomo Ra'anán prepared for sleep in the bedroom of his trailer home in Tel Rumeida. Rabbi Ra'anán was the grandson of Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak Kook. He had studied at the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva, where his teacher was his uncle, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook. After the Six-Day War, he moved with his family to the new settlement of Betar. Following the Israeli expulsion of settlers from Yamit in the Sinai in 1982, Rabbi Ra'anán and his wife Chaya decided to relocate to Hebron. Already in his mid-fifties, he yearned for a place where he might make a significant Jewish contribution.

Choosing Tel Rumeida for their new home, the Ra'anáns lived in the most isolated and precarious Jewish neighborhood in Hebron, where the government had permitted only a limited Jewish presence since 1984. The Ra'anáns, whose grandchildren already were the ages of the children of their new neighbors, joined six other families, including recent immigrants from Russia and the parents of twelve children who spread their family across two caravans. To Chaya Ra'anán, it felt "like we were moving to Gan Eden." Rabbi Ra'anán quickly became revered among Hebron Jews for his Torah wisdom and quiet humility, displayed during his daily visits to Machpelah for study and prayer.

At 11:00 P.M. that August evening, a Hebron Arab, armed with a knife and a firebomb, climbed through the bedroom window of the Ra'anán trailer and stabbed Rabbi Ra'anán in the chest. Struggling valiantly to protect his wife, the rabbi trailed his assailant into the living room, where he was stabbed again before the attacker threw his firebomb and fled. Pulled from his burning home by a Tel Rumeida paramedic who tried desperately to save his life, the rabbi died moments later.

With the city placed under a military curfew and closure, Prime Minister Netanyahu, the first prime minister to visit the Hebron community in nearly twenty years, came to pay his respect to the Ra'anán family. During his visit, the prime minister was evidently surprised by the hazardous living conditions in Tel Rumeida, observing, "These walls are so thin you can put your fist through them." Netanyahu declared that construction of permanent housing in Tel Rumeida would soon begin. But the mandatory preliminary step for new construction was archaeological excavation. By the time the six-month dig was concluded, Netanyahu was no longer prime minister, and the successor Labor government of Ehud Barak refused to issue building permits. Temporary roofing covered the

excavations—which included the remains of an ancient Israelite four-room house, grain silo, and wine press.

With the outbreak of the second Palestinian intifada in 2000, Tel Rumeida came under more frequent sniper attack from Arabs in the nearby hills. Pockmarked with bullet holes, the trailers offered little refuge for their residents, who lived behind sandbagged windows in a virtual war zone. Only after Ariel Sharon became prime minister in 2001 were the necessary construction permits for permanent housing finally issued. Defense Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, asked why he did not simply close the area to habitation, responded, “There are some places you cannot throw Jews out of.”

Arab attacks against Hebron Jews continued. Shootings occurred in Kiryat Arba, on the road to Tel Rumeida, and outside Beit Hadassah. On their daily rounds, Jewish residents encountered cascades of stones, bottles, and firebombs—and some retaliated. That October, several community leaders met with the former military commander of Judea and Samaria, who conceded what they already knew: the Oslo process had compounded the already precarious security situation for Hebron Jews by leaving the Israeli army dependent on cooperation, conspicuously absent, from Yasir Arafat and the Palestinian Authority.

A tense meeting was held with Prime Minister Netanyahu at his office in Jerusalem. The settlers’ message was sharp: “The Oslo accords have proven to be a total failure. The entire process has collapsed. You are continuing as if nothing has happened, and our lives are jeopardized as a result.” They described Hebron as a “hell zone,” where Israel was forced to depend on Arafat and “his terrorist thugs” to protect its citizens. Rabbi Hillel Horowitz, who lived next door to the Ra’anans in Tel Rumeida, recounted the horrible screams from the Ra’anan home during the terrorist attack. Chaya Ra’anan had recently found herself only a few meters away from an exploding hand grenade and a round of bullets that left her feeling that her “Eden” had become “a war zone.” For an hour, Netanyahu listened and said little other than to promise to try to speed up new construction.

But Zakariah el-Bakri, an Arab who lived next to the Tel Rumeida building site, went to court to block the construction plan. To be sure, he had built his own house over unexcavated ruins, without seeking approval from the Israel Antiquities Authority. Understandably, the Jewish past in Hebron was of no interest to him. Despite his legal objections, the new building finally was completed in 2003, five years after Rabbi Ra’anan’s death and Prime Minister Netanyahu’s promise. It contained six apartments and a study hall named Ohr Shlomo, in memory of the murdered rabbi.

But “there is no security and no peace” for Hebron Jews, wrote former Defense Minister Moshe Arens. The Hebron agreement, he concluded, “has put the lives of Hebron’s Jews in daily jeopardy.” By night and day, Palestinians fired bullets from their own zone into the besieged Israeli sector. “There are moments when it is quite frightening,” acknowledged Ruth Hizmi, whose Hebron apartment was pockmarked with bullet holes. “At night my five-year-old daughter gets up crying and doesn’t want me to leave her alone.” Tempers frayed in Hebron: Arab peddlers in the Israeli zone were assaulted and their stalls overthrown, and graffiti portraying Muhammad as a “pig,” accompanied by swastikas, was painted on shop gates. Behind stone-throwing Palestinians was a painted wall message declaring, “The uprising continues on the path to liberation.” Hebron was indeed a war zone.

On March 26, 2001, Yitzhak and Oriya Pas strolled through a playground with their first child, ten-month-old Shalhevet, on the way to visit her grandparents in the Avraham Avinu quarter. Members of the Pas family were familiar with violence in Hebron. Walking to morning prayers in Machpelah eight years earlier, Oriya’s father had been assaulted by an ax-wielding Arab. Three years later, her fourteen-year-old twin sister, walking through the market, was stabbed in the back. In a subsequent attack, Yitzhak’s brother had been shot in the leg.

Just the day before, in a gesture to permit the return of a measure of normal life during the Ramadan holiday, Israeli troops had been withdrawn from the Palestinian zone, where they had been stationed since Rabbi Ra’anana’s murder. That morning, a sniper in the Abu Sneineh hills overlooking the city fired three shots into the playground. One bullet grazed the arm of a three-year-old girl. Another wounded Shalhevet’s father in the leg. The third struck Shalhevet in the head and instantly killed her.

For its gratuitous cruelty, the murder of Shalhevet Pas instantly became international news. The Israeli media, not noted for its sympathy for Hebron Jews, even referred to the death of an “Israeli,” not a “settler,” baby. The grief-stricken Pas family refused to bury their child until the government seized the Abu Sneineh hills, which Hebron Jews had urged Prime Minister Netanyahu, for reasons of security and safety, not to relinquish to the Palestinians. But the Sharon government declined to take military action. As the stalemate worsened and the attendant publicity increased, the prime minister, joined by Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, implored Shalhevet’s parents to relent. Some critics began to complain that the funeral was being postponed for political motives. After a week, the Pas family decided to bury Shalhevet so that time would still remain for the traditional seven-day mourning period before the beginning of the Passover holiday.

The funeral of Shalhevet Pas began with the reading of Psalms at Machpelah. A long line of silent mourners, including many who came to Hebron from a considerable distance to express their sympathy and solidarity, followed the grieving family up the hill to the old Jewish cemetery. Family members and friends took turns carrying Shalhevet's body, wrapped in a deep blue velvet cloth with the Star of David embroidered on it. To a mourner from Jerusalem, "she looked about the size of the Torah scroll taken out of the ark for reading."

At the gravesite, a speaker compared the Palestinians to Nazis, who also had killed innocent Jewish children. Others demanded revenge. A Russian refusenik recalled sadly that when he attended the funerals of Pinchas and Shlomo Lapid, nearly ten years earlier, he had prayed—in vain as it turned out—that their funerals would be the last. An Israeli Cabinet member from the ultra-Orthodox Shas Party represented the government. Prime Minister Sharon did not attend. Yitzhak Pas, Shalhevet's father, recited *Kaddish* while seated in his wheelchair.

After the funeral, Mayor Katzover of Kiryat Arba declared, "It's time for war." The army began shelling the Abu Sneineh hills, but government ministers were losing patience with the enraged Hebron community. Defense Minister Ben-Eliezer threatened to withdraw Israeli soldiers from Hebron if the settlers did not show them more respect. Transportation Minister Ephraim Sneh complained to an Israeli news broadcaster that settlers "view the IDF as a tool to carry out their objective, which is, in the end, to seize control of Palestinian Hebron." Yitzhak Levy, head of the National Religious Party, urged Prime Minister Sharon to make a "courageous decision" to either retake Abu Sneineh or evacuate the Jewish community from Hebron. Sharon did neither. One year later, Israeli security forces arrested Mahmud Muhammed Mahmud Amro, a twenty-six-year-old resident of the Hebron neighborhood of Wadi Alhariah. Briefly detained by Palestinian police after the murder of Shalhevet Pas, he now confessed to her killing.

Oriya Pas, Shalhevet's grieving mother, walked in the footsteps of her Hebron family predecessors. She had grown up in Hebron, where her father, sister, brother-in-law, and husband had been wounded and now her daughter murdered in terrorist attacks. Through it all, her family remained in Hebron. Five years after the murder of Shalhevet, it had grown to include two daughters and a son. Living not far from the site of Shalhevet's death, the Pas children enjoyed the playground where the ten-month-old sister they never knew had been murdered.

The memory of Shalhevet ("flame") would not only be honored by lighting memorial candles but also, in characteristic Hebron fashion, by renewed settlement. As they had so often done, Hebron settlers responded to a terrorist attack by reclaiming Jewish property and inhabiting it. Now they focused on a five-dunam plot in the center of Hebron, purchased

for the Jewish community in 1807 by Haim Bajayo (identified as “Haim HaMitzri the Jew”). Registered as Jewish *heqdes* (sanctified property), it subsequently became the site of the home and synagogue of Hebron Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Mani. Following the 1929 expulsion, an Arab fruit and vegetable market was built on the site. After the Six-Day War, the Israeli Custodian for Abandoned Property rented the property, still registered in the names of its Jewish owners, to the Hebron Arab municipality. The site had been closed for security reasons in 1997.

Despite requests from the Jewish community for its use, it had remained vacant. Colonel Dror Weinberg, the commander of the Hebron Brigade who was uncommonly sensitive to the settlers’ plight and deeply respected by the local Jewish community, gave permission for the market to be used as a “day camp” for children. Not long afterward, a small number of Hebron Jews renovated the market stalls, converting them into small apartments, with an adjacent Torah study hall. Naming it the “Mitzpe Shalhevet Neighborhood,” eight Jewish families moved in.

Local Arab vendors sued to reopen the market. The attorney general’s office notified the High Court of Justice that because their leases had expired, they no longer retained any legal rights to the Jewish-owned property. But it also declared that the Mitzpe Shalhevet “trespassers” must not be rewarded for their seizure of the property. In June 2005, after the mass evacuation of Jewish settlers from Gaza, a supervisor from the Civil Administration posted an eviction notice at the site, declaring that the new residents were illegal occupants and ordering them “to remove themselves from the land within forty-five days.” To Yitzhak Pas, Shalhevet’s father, “eviction of the Mitzpe Shalhevet neighborhood will be, for me, as if they killed my daughter a second time.”

Hebron representatives petitioned a military appeals committee to overturn the eviction order. By a two-to-one vote, it ruled that although the land was owned by a private Jewish organization, the buildings were under Israeli government jurisdiction. Former High Court Judge Avraham Halima was sharply critical of the settlers, who “simply invaded the plot of land and seized it by force.” Such action, he insisted, was unacceptable. But his judicial colleagues suggested that the best solution would be to lease the property to the Jewish community, a proposal that sparked further wrangling among government officials.

The market impasse was explored in meetings between the director of the Civil Administration, the head of central military command, the army chief of staff, and the defense minister. They finally agreed that the new settlement was an illegal seizure but decided not to act “in order not to cause a conflagration in the city.” The defense minister postponed expulsion indefinitely. An uneasy status quo, with the settlers still ensconced in their new homes, remained in place.

In January 2006, the Jewish residents of Mitzpe Shalhevet averted imminent forced evacuation when the entire Hebron community, at an emergency meeting called in the middle of the night, agreed that they would leave voluntarily. In return, it received assurance from General Yair Golan, army commander in Judea and Samaria, that the families would be permitted to return. Three months later, however, Attorney General Menahem Mazuz voided the agreement, claiming that General Golan had not been authorized to make it. Nonetheless, several families defiantly reclaimed the site.

The new government of Ehud Olmert, sharply condemning “the wild and unrestrained behavior” of “extremist elements” in Hebron, was determined to uproot the entrenched families. Five hundred soldiers, accompanied by police mounted on horseback and armed with water cannons and antiriot equipment, were dispatched to Hebron to force the evacuation of eight Jewish families. Among the evicted residents were Rabbi Yisrael Shlissel, his wife Tzippi, and their ten children. Tzippi Schlissel was the daughter of Rabbi Ra’anana, murdered seven years earlier in Tel Rumeida. The Schlissel family had moved to Hebron after his death to be closer to her widowed mother. With the evictions, the apartments on the plot of land purchased by “Haim HaMitzri” in 1807 stood empty. A huge banner, stretching across the entrance to the old market area, read, “Stolen Jewish Property.” Ironically, the only obstacle to the return of Jews to Jewish-owned property in Hebron, where Jewish legal title was indisputable, was the government of Israel.

But the struggle over Mitzpe Shalhevet continued when two families quietly returned to their abandoned apartments. In the summer of 2007, Defense Minister Ehud Barak once again mobilized the army and police to evict them. This time, nearly 3,000 police, border police, and soldiers arrived in Hebron to forcibly evacuate the entrenched families and their supporters, who had barricaded themselves inside their apartments. With doors welded shut, it took two hours for the security forces to break through and remove the inhabitants. The last to be expelled were three settlement supporters who had locked themselves inside a cement bunker. During the accompanying scuffles, fifteen police officers and twenty-five protesters received injuries. Thirteen activists were arrested for attacking police and throwing stones. All the homes in Mitzpe Shalhevet were demolished.

The property was described in the *New York Times*—erroneously—as “owned by Palestinians” (a correction belatedly followed). But the *Times* accurately identified a collateral issue that alarmed Israelis far more than the eviction itself: nearly forty IDF soldiers (including two company commanders), after being informed by their officers that they would forcibly evict two Jewish families from their Hebron homes, had refused to board

the buses to Hebron. The soldiers (all of whom had participated in the *hesder* program that combines religious education with military service) belonged to an elite infantry unit that specializes in urban combat. Some among them were persuaded to reconsider, but twelve who disobeyed orders were summarily court-martialed and sentenced to a month in military prison.

To Major General Gadi Shamni, head of Central Command, such disobedience “endangers the foundations on which [the army] operates, being the people’s army in a democratic state, which is obligated to carry out any mission given to it.” In a veiled reference to rabbis who had counseled the disobedient soldiers, Defense Minister Ehud Barak declared that “soldiers receive their order from their commanders and no one else, no matter how important or honorable he might be. . . . Refusing orders on ideological grounds is morally indefensible. . . . Just as it is wrong for the left to refuse to serve in the territories, it is wrong for the right to refuse to evacuate them.”

A spokesman for the Rabbinical Council of Judea and Samaria responded, “The army shouldn’t be drafting children of Judea and Samaria to throw their families out of their homes.” Knesset member Tzvi Hendel of the National Religious Party insisted, “We are not a dictatorship. . . . We are not talking about soldiers refusing to fight in a war, but soldiers refusing to carry out a political operation, which is not the mission of the IDF.” Moshe Rosenfeld, the father of one of the disobedient soldiers, told Army Radio, “My son didn’t join the army to expel Jews, but to protect them.” One week later, a subcommittee of the Knesset Defense and Foreign Affairs Committee recommended that the government override the expulsion decision by the Israeli prosecutor’s office and permit legal residency of the Mitzpe Shalhevet site by Jewish families. The prosecutor’s office declined to follow the recommendation.

The refusal of soldiers to participate in the Mitzpe Shalhevet expulsion focused renewed attention on the nagging quandary of Zionist legitimacy—and the political double standard that often fueled it. When secular leftists had refused to serve in Lebanon or in Judea and Samaria, their disobedience had been enthusiastically defended in Israeli liberal circles as the triumph of individual conscience over state authority. The foundations of the state had not then seemed endangered. But when a dozen religious soldiers refused orders to evacuate Jewish families from Jewish property in Hebron, secular Zionists were outraged. Once again, as after the Goldstein massacre, there were audible murmurings about another “*Altalena*” unless the authority of the state was forcibly asserted. The conflict over Hebron—not between Arabs and Jews but among Israelis—raised unsettling questions about the ultimate source of legitimacy in a state claiming to be both Jewish and democratic.

Under the Hebron accord of 1997, one of the ten days each year when Jews enjoy exclusive rights to Machpelah is Shabbat *Chaye Sarah*, early in the new year, when thousands of visitors flood Hebron to hear the Torah recount Abraham's purchase of the Machpelah burial cave. That early November day in 2002 passed peacefully. With Israeli soldiers out in force to protect the community, Hebron Jews, in the traditional spirit of Abraham, opened their homes to guests. In Tel Rumeida, residents prepared an abundant lunch for visitors at outdoor picnic tables. The Beit Hadassah grounds, the Avraham Avinu playground, and their neighboring streets overflowed with visitors and residents who enjoyed the rare opportunity for public relaxation in Hebron. At Mitzpe Shalhevet, residents proudly displayed their newly restored apartments.

Exactly two weeks later, a group of Kiryat Arba residents, escorted as usual by Israeli soldiers, was returning home after the conclusion of *Shabbat* prayer services in *Me'arat HaMachpelah*. The Israeli army had only recently been redeployed from Hebron in an attempt to ease life for local Palestinians during Ramadan. Hebron Brigade commander Colonel Dror Weinberg had vigorously opposed the redeployment order because it endangered the Jewish community, but he had been overruled. Just hours before the beginning of *Shabbat*, he warned his superiors that Islamic Jihad was preparing a major terror attack in the Hebron area. No special precautions were authorized.

Colonel Weinberg, a graduate of the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva in Jerusalem, displayed uncommon empathy for the Hebron settlers. After choosing a military career, he rose quickly through the ranks. Sworn in as an officer in Hebron in 1996, he served in the Paratroop Brigade and was a likely choice for its commander once his Hebron assignment ended. A religious Zionist, he became one of only a few senior officers who wore a *kippa*. His "wonderful sensitivity for human life and feelings," recalled one respectful admirer, enabled him to forge close and trusting relationships with many settlers during his year as Hebron Brigade commander.

That *Shabbat* evening, three Palestinian members of Islamic Jihad, armed with automatic rifles and grenades, stationed themselves on the rooftops of Palestinian houses overlooking the "worshippers' path," near the entrance to Kiryat Arba. After the recent Israeli military redeployment, they had returned to Hebron from hideouts outside the city. Guiding the Kiryat Arba residents to their homes, four soldiers suddenly encountered a fusillade of gunfire. Three died instantly; the fourth lay wounded in the street. Security guards from Kiryat Arba returned fire, killing one of the assailants. Border police drove their jeep into an alley to flush out the others; another gunman, emerging from a doorway firing at close range, murdered three of them before he was killed.

Learning of the attack, Colonel Weinberg sped to the scene. Bounding from his jeep, he entered the alley to rescue the stranded Israelis. Shot in the chest almost immediately, he died moments later. At the end of more than an hour of fighting, the terrorists, along with twelve Israelis, were dead. Four soldiers and five border policemen had been killed, along with three members of the emergency response team from Kiryat Arba. Masterminded by Fawzi Ayoub, a Lebanese Hezbollah officer who had only recently been captured in Hebron by the IDF (and released), it was the second-deadliest attack on Israeli military forces since the beginning of the second intifada, exceeded only in Jenin two years earlier. Weinberg, thirty-eight years old, was the highest-ranking Israeli officer to die in combat since that battle.

His death was a devastating loss for the Hebron community. "There was nobody like him," said Kiryat Arba mayor Tzvi Katzover. Weinberg died, eulogized Central Command Major-General Moshe Kaplinsky, "defending what he so much believed in: providing security for the Jewish residents of this region." Rabbi Eliezer Waldman, head of the Kiryat Arba yeshiva, praised him as "a hero who acquired his valor and strength from sources of holiness and faith, a modern-day Maccabee." Buried in Kfar Saba, where he had spent his boyhood, Weinberg was survived by his pregnant wife Hadassah and their five children. When Hadassah gave birth to a son several months later, she described him as him "the special gift Dror has left me."

Those who died with Colonel Weinberg were a microcosm of the Zionist diversity of the Hebron community. Among the murdered security guards from Kiryat Arba were Alex Duchan, father of five, who had immigrated to Israel from France as a teenager; Alex Svitman, an immigrant from Ukraine, who had just finished reciting *kiddush* and toasting his wife's birthday when his emergency beeper sounded; and Yitzhak Buanesh, who had lived in Kiryat Arba for twenty years following military service in the special "Alpine" unit. Father of seven children and head of the Kiryat Arba emergency response team, his family had often hosted Colonel Weinberg for *Shabbat* dinner when military obligations kept the officer from returning home to Jerusalem. Among the other attack victims were two immigrants from Azerbaijan, a Druze officer with six brothers in the IDF, and the son of residents of the nearby Etzion bloc.

In Hebron and Kiryat Arba, sorrow was mixed with bitterness. "We warned the withdrawal of the IDF from Hebron would lead to continued terror," declared Hebron spokesman David Wilder, but "no one cared." After *Shabbat*, a large crowd of Kiryat Arba residents gathered at the site of the murders. As Wilder explained, "When they try and kill us, not only will we not leave, rather, on the contrary, we will bring in more people

to live here. . . . We must transform the field, adjacent to the site of their murder, from a field of death to a field of life." Insisting on "a true Zionist response," residents demanded new homes for Jews to ensure a safe corridor between Kiryat Arba and Hebron.

Prime Minister Sharon, joined by his defense minister and army commanders, visited the scene of the "*Shabbat* Massacre." Sharon was quoted as saying that he wanted Israel to take control of the land between Kiryat Arba and Hebron, linking the two communities in "territorial contiguity." Three houses used by the terrorists were demolished, but for the usual political considerations, no new construction was authorized.

The spate of terrorist attacks responsible for the deaths of Rabbi Ra'anana, Shalhevet Pas, Colonel Weinberg, and the soldiers and security guards who died with him devastated the Hebron community. But each loss strengthened its determination to transform death into new life, symbolized by a new house, a new neighborhood, and new residents. Mourning their dead, Hebron Jews asserted their right to build their community, where life and death, return and renewal, were inseparable.

The Ra'anana family exemplified their determination. After Rabbi Ra'anana's murder, his daughter Tzippi and her family had moved to Mitzpe Shalhevet, the refurbished vegetable market, so that she could be near her widowed mother. Following their expulsion, they relocated to Tel Rumeida, near the site of her father's death. Her husband, Rabbi Yisrael Shlissel, became dean of the Ohr Shlomo Torah Study Center, established in her father's memory in the room where he was murdered. Tzippi's eleventh child, a son, was named Avraham Yitzhak after his great-great grandfather Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook, the spiritual leader of religious Zionism whose son Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook inspired the settlement movement after the Six-Day War. With the *bris* of Avraham Yitzhak, the lineage and legacy of this distinguished rabbinical family was renewed in Hebron.

Just months earlier, the fortieth anniversary of the Six-Day War had sparked vigorous debate throughout Israel over its unanticipated consequences. It had seemed, in 1967, a miraculous triumph; its name evoked biblical creation. As a soldier had marveled, "The whole of the Promised Land is ours." Daniela Weiss, who became mayor of the settlement of Kedumim near Nablus, recalled, "We felt literally the revival of the biblical narrative." Even Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin, not ordinarily inclined to public moments of introspection or emotion, had affirmed that when soldiers arrived at the Western Wall "well-springs of excitement and spiritual emotion" had suddenly and unexpectedly been tapped. He recalled the paratroopers who had wept on touching its stones: "This scene on the Temple Mount beyond the power of verbal description revealed as though by a lightning flash truths that were deeply hidden."

In a stunning moment of encounter with its biblical homeland, Israel had seemed suddenly transformed from a state of Jews into a Jewish state returned to its ancient borders. By the end of that extraordinary week, "Israelis who had never known they were Jews," literary scholar Harold Fisch wrote in *The Zionist Revolution*, "suddenly awoke to their inheritance." "We drew strength from that victory," recalled Benny Katzover, a graduate of Mercaz HaRav and one of the founders of Gush Emunim. "Until that point religious Jews deferred to the secular Zionists. We were along for the ride, but we never sat in the driver's seat. . . . In the army, we were embarrassed [by] our *kippot*. Many of us simply took them off." But after the war, "we as a group were slowly transformed. . . . We walked proud and upright." A new generational cohort of rabbis who fused strong Zionist commitments with long Jewish memories had led a burgeoning movement of young Israelis—proudly bearing the venerable Zionist label of "settler"—back to the destroyed communities of Gush Etzion and Hebron, one symbolizing Zionist valor and the other weighty with memories of biblical antiquity and modern tragedy.

But those "deeply hidden" truths had quickly evaporated. It was not long before this historic moment of return, with its tantalizing promise of reconciliation between Zionism and Judaism, began to spark bitter acrimony. Forty years later, most Israelis saw nothing but the deleterious consequences of settlement, "occupation," and religious fanaticism. The secular majority, largely indifferent if not hostile to claims of Jewish history and religious observance, yearned for "*normaliut*," defined largely by Western individualism and affluence. Their spiritual lodestar was located in Tel Aviv, not in Jerusalem and certainly not in Hebron. The settlements that sprouted throughout Judea and Samaria, especially in the "Arab" city of Hebron (Arab, to be sure, only because Jews had been murdered, expelled, and forbidden to return), challenged secular Zionists at the core of their identity. They were infuriated by the passionate reiteration of Zionist values by "men with crocheted *kippot* and women with long skirts." Religious settlers—not Yasir Arafat, Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, or the intransigent Arab states—were routinely castigated as the primary obstacles to peace.

Forty years after the Six-Day War, it had become evident that the brief fusion of Zionism and Judaism back in 1967 had all but dissipated. Among secular Israelis, for whom convergence threatened their own cultural and political supremacy, the Six-Day War had become a national disaster. Its consequences, according to *Haaretz* journalist Tom Segev, were "forty years of oppression and Palestinian terrorism," which "have undermined Israel's Jewish and democratic foundations." Former Likud minister Dan Meridor explained to a reporter, "There are no free miracles"; Israelis had finally come to realize the perils of "messianic ideas." To a security adviser

to Prime Minister Sharon, the Six-Day War had become “a cancer,” corrupting Israeli life with the burden of occupation. A Hebrew University professor believed that the primary significance of the war was that it had generated “religious messianic fervor on both sides of the conflict,” an implicit equation of Jewish settlers and Palestinian terrorists as messianic moral equivalents.

Even Israelis who took a more nuanced view of the consequences of 1967 voiced reservations. Michael Oren, author of *Six Days of War*, the most comprehensive exploration of the antecedents and results of the conflict, conceded that forty years later many Israelis “are questioning whether they indeed won the Six-Day War—or whether it was in fact a Pyrrhic victory leading to more wars, prolonged occupation, internal political turmoil and terror.” Writer Yossi Klein Halevi identified “an impossible dilemma” for Israelis after 1967: “How do we remain faithful to the Jewish historical experience of return to the land, and at the same time, how do we remain faithful to the expectation of Jewish history that we do so in a just way?” Israel Harel, writing in *Haaretz*, aptly described the anniversary week of the Six-Day War as “the days of self-laceration.”

On the *Shabbat* of the fortieth anniversary commemoration, amid Israeli lamentations over the legacy of the war, Jews attending synagogue services read *Sh’lah L’kha* from the Torah. It recounts the faithlessness of the spies—except Caleb and Joshua—who were sent by Moses to scout out the land. Their evident apprehension prompted the terrified Israelites to relinquish the challenge of settling the land and yearn for return to Egyptian servitude. But on that *Shabbat* the coincidental loss of faith by ancient Israelites and modern Israelis passed unnoticed.

The partition agreement in the 1997 accord imposed a heavy burden on Hebron Jews. Despite assurances of free access throughout the city, they have been prevented from visiting venerable shrines outside their own zone. They no longer have access to Jewish property in the Arab zone or even to all Jewish property within their own zone. The Palestinian Authority, with substantial international assistance, has funded schools and other institutions within the Jewish sector in an effort to encourage Arabs, many of whom abandoned their homes and stores there after the accord was signed, to return. Those who do so are generously subsidized with exemptions from taxes and municipal fees, free water and electricity, and monthly stipends.

Yet even in the fiercely contested and often violent ancient city of Hebron, Jews still find ways to live normal lives. Lawyers advise clients, artists paint, teachers teach, doctors treat patients, yeshiva students study Jewish texts, and mothers nurture their babies. Schoolchildren read the Torah to learn Jewish history and values; their rhythmic recitations reverberate through the streets beyond their classrooms. After school, they

play outside, protectively monitored by older siblings, with Israeli soldiers close by. The local high school is in Kiryat Arba, where there is also a small supermarket, some modest restaurants, an archaeological museum of Hebron history, a modern medical center, and Baruch Goldstein's grave site.

Jewish Hebron can seem bleak at best, at worst menacing. The constant presence of Israeli soldiers in full battle gear, patrolling in jeeps and guarding Jewish buildings, is a reminder that tranquility is fragile. At any moment, a beeper network can instantly mobilize the entire community to confront danger. The calls to prayer from the *muezzin*, reverberating loudly at intervals through the day and night, are intrusive. Returning a year after the Goldstein murders, a *New York Times* reporter described "a ghost town," with few pedestrians and many shops shuttered closed. A decade later, the Jewish zone in the partitioned city remained a desolate urban landscape filled with many decrepit empty buildings. With development stifled by the government, much of the Israeli sector, with its dilapidated Ottoman core and abandoned houses and shops, still resembled a war zone. Amenities for Hebron Jews are limited; except for scattered playgrounds, there are few outdoor public spaces. Trees are scarce. Netting stretched across al-Casbah Street, once a vibrant market, has become a repository for garbage.

Muslims consider Hebron to be theirs, but few Israelis or Jews anywhere care about Hebron—or the millennia of Jewish history encapsulated there. To Hebron Jews, who can rarely persuade their own government to permit them to inhabit abandoned Jewish property, no less purchase an Arab-owned building, such discriminatory practices constitute an obvious attempt to strangle their community. Even in *Me'arat HaMachpelah*, where Jews have protected but limited access to interior rooms and halls, their space is frequently invaded when the *muezzin* passes through on his way to call Muslims to prayer. On days when only Muslims are permitted in Machpelah, Jewish holy books have been desecrated and urine stains discovered near the *aron* that holds the Torah scrolls.

But Hebron settlers are nothing if not determined and persistent. Ever since Abraham's purchase of Machpelah, tiny handfuls of Jews in almost every generation have retained a deeply primal connection to the burial place of their biblical patriarchs and matriarchs. For 3,000 years, Hebron has symbolized something ineradicable from Jewish consciousness: the power of memory. No Israeli prime minister in forty years—whether from Labor under Eshkol, Meir, Rabin, Peres, and Barak; Likud under Begin, Shamir, and Netanyahu; or Kadima under Sharon and Olmert—has yet succeeded in dislodging them.

In his compelling history of the Jewish people, Paul Johnson writes, "When the historian visits Hebron today he asks himself: where are all those peoples which once held the place?" Where, he wonders, are the

Canaanites, Edomites, Romans, Byzantines, Crusaders, Mameluks, and Ottomans? “They have vanished into time, irrevocably. But the Jews are still in Hebron.” Jews, he concluded, “are the most tenacious people in history. Hebron is there to prove it.”

By now, some Jewish settlements in Samaria, north of Jerusalem, have begun to consider securing their future within Israel by redirecting their focus from political controversy to tourism—with plans for boutique wineries, hiking and biking trails, and health spas. But the Jewish community of Hebron remains determined to demonstrate the tenacity of Jewish memory. “Jewish Hebron,” writes Kiryat Arba historian Arieh Klein, “connects the nation to its past . . . to its identity.”



Legitimacy

Hebron Jews are the pariahs of the Jewish people. In a sustained verbal onslaught, critics on the secular left have excoriated the entire settlement movement, especially its Hebron vanguard, for allegedly violating international law, undermining Israeli democracy, and betraying Zionist ideals. Historian Idith Zertal and journalist Akiva Eldar, authors of the first comprehensive survey of Jewish settlement since the Six-Day War, have sharply condemned it as a movement of illegal occupation, plunder, destruction, and lawlessness. “Stabbed into the heart of an Arab town,” they write in *Lords of the Land*, the Hebron Jewish community became “the hothouse of the entire settlement project with its subversion and defiance of the law and of Israeli democracy.”

Rarely in modern Jewish history have any Jews been so despised and reviled by other Jews. Coming from any other source, such unrelenting venom easily would qualify as anti-Semitism. The religious nationalism of settlers in Hebron and more than 100 other settlements scattered through Judea and Samaria challenges secular Zionism, the dominant political and cultural ideology of Israel since it achieved independence in 1948—indeed since the birth of the Zionist movement at the end of the nineteenth century. In the continuing struggle to define the meaning of Jewish statehood, the yearning for normalization (“a tolerant modern civil state,” according to Herzl) clashes with an ancient legacy of Jewish distinctiveness. (“For out of Zion shall Torah go forth,” the prophet Isaiah proclaimed.) Barely below the surface of the settlement critique lurks a palpable apprehension lest Israel, the state of Jews, come to resemble a

Jewish state. In this struggle for national self-definition, Hebron is the pivot on which the Jewish identity of Israel will ultimately turn.

At the core of the settlement critique is the incessant allegation, rarely scrutinized or challenged, that Israeli settlements established in “occupied” territory since 1967—and certainly those in the “Arab” city of Hebron—are illegal under international law. It surfaced within government circles three months after the Six-Day War ended when Theodor Meron, legal counsel for the Israeli Foreign Ministry, sent a memo to Foreign Minister Eban, a copy of which he forwarded to Prime Minister Eshkol. “My conclusion,” Meron wrote, “is that civilian settlement in the administered territories contravenes the explicit provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention.”

The Geneva Convention, adopted in 1949 in the shadow of World War II atrocities, declared that an “occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.” Article 49, Meron noted, was intended to forever prevent repetition of the notorious Nazi forced transfers of civilian populations—for “political and racial reasons”—from conquered territory to slave and extermination camps. As a youthful prisoner in a Nazi labor camp, Meron had painful personal memories of such population transfers, when hundreds of thousands of Jews were deported from their homes and replaced by foreign nationals. He insisted that the Geneva prohibition was “categorical and is not conditioned on the motives or purposes of the transfer.”

Meron’s legal opinion, recently rediscovered by journalist Gershom Gorenberg during his research for a critical study of the early years of Jewish settlement, was filed and forgotten—for good reason. It was neither persuasive to his superiors nor an accurate appraisal of the applicability of the Geneva Convention to the new Israeli settlements in the former West Bank of the Kingdom of Jordan. Military Advocate General Meir Shamgar, who subsequently became attorney general and then chief judge of the Supreme Court, asserted, “The legal applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention to these territories is in doubt.” The government of Israel has never accepted the validity of Meron’s argument.

To the contrary, Israeli settlement throughout the West Bank is explicitly protected by international agreements dating from the World War I era, subsequently reaffirmed after World War II and never revoked since. The Balfour Declaration of 1917, calling for “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people,” was endorsed in the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine, drafted at the San Remo Conference in 1920, and unanimously adopted two years later. The mandate recognized

“the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine” and “the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country.” Jews were guaranteed the right of “close settlement” throughout “Palestine,” geographically defined by the mandate as comprising land both east and west of the Jordan River (which ultimately became Jordan, the West Bank, and Israel). This was not framed as a gift to the Jewish people; rather, based on recognition of historical rights reaching back into antiquity, it was their entitlement.

Jewish settlement throughout Palestine was limited by the mandate in only one respect: Great Britain, the Mandatory Trustee, acting in conjunction with the League of Nations Council, retained the discretion to “postpone” or “withhold” the right of Jews to settle east—but *not* west—of the Jordan River. Consistent with that solitary exception and to placate the ambitions of the Hashemite Sheikh Abdullah for his own territory to rule, Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill removed the land east of the river from the borders of Palestine. Churchill anticipated that the newly demarcated territory, comprising three-quarters of Mandatory Palestine, would become a future Arab state. On the establishment of Transjordan in 1922, the British prohibited Jewish settlement there. But the status of Jewish settlement west of the Jordan River was unchanged. Under the terms of the mandate, the internationally guaranteed legal right of Jews to settle anywhere in the truncated quarter of Palestine and build their national home there remained in force.

Never further modified, abridged, or terminated, the Mandate for Palestine outlived the League of Nations. In the Charter of the United Nations, drafted in 1945, Article 80 explicitly protected the rights of “any peoples” and “the terms of existing international instruments to which members of the United Nations may respectively be parties.” Drafted by Jewish legal representatives—including liberal American Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, Peter Bergson from the right-wing Irgun, and Ben-Zion Netanyahu (father of the future prime minister)—at the founding conference of the United Nations, Article 80 became known as “the Palestine clause.” It preserved the rights of the Jewish people to “close settlement” throughout the remaining portion of their Palestinian homeland west of the Jordan River, precisely as the mandate had affirmed. These rights were flagrantly violated when Jordan invaded Israel in 1948, effectively obliterating U.N. Resolution 181 calling for the partition of Palestine into an Arab and Jewish state. Jordan’s claim to the West Bank, recognized only by Great Britain and Pakistan, had no international legal standing.

Contrary to Theodor Meron’s citation of Article 49, the Geneva Convention did not restrict Jewish settlement in the land acquired by Israel

during the Six-Day War. Israel's seizure of that territory in a war of self-defense did not violate international law. And, as Eugene V. Rostow, formerly dean of Yale Law School and undersecretary of state for political affairs between 1966 and 1969, noted, the government of Israel neither "deported" Palestinians nor "transferred" Israelis during or after 1967. (Indeed, beginning with the return to Hebron, as successive Israeli governments would discover to their dismay, settlers often acted on their own volition without government authorization.) Furthermore, Rostow noted, the Geneva Convention applied only to acts by one signatory "carried out on the territory of another." The West Bank, however, did not belong to a signatory power, for Jordan had no sovereign rights or legal claims there. Its legal status was defined as "an unallocated part of the British Mandate."

With Jordan's defeat in 1967, a "vacuum in sovereignty" existed on the West Bank. Under international law, the Israeli military administration became the custodian of territories until their return to the original sovereign—in this instance, according to the League of Nations Mandate, the Jewish people for their "national home in Palestine." Israeli settlement was not prohibited; indeed, under the mandate, it was explicitly protected. Jews retained the same legal right to settle in the West Bank that they enjoyed in Tel Aviv, Haifa, or the Galilee.

After the Six-Day War, new UN resolutions—which Rostow was instrumental in drafting—were specifically applied to the territory acquired by Israel. According to Security Council Resolution 242, Israel was permitted to administer it until "a just and lasting peace in the Middle East" was achieved. Even then, Israel would only be required to withdraw its armed forces "from territories"—not from "the territories" or "all the territories"—that it administered. The absence of "the," the famous missing definite article, was neither an accident nor an afterthought; it resulted from what Rostow described as more than five months of "vehement public diplomacy" to clarify the meaning of Resolution 242. Israel would not be required to withdraw from all the territory that it had acquired during the Six-Day War; indeed, precisely such proposals were defeated in both the Security Council and the General Assembly. No prohibition on Jewish settlement, wherever it had been guaranteed by the Mandate for Palestine forty-five years earlier, was adopted.

"The Jewish right of settlement in the area," Rostow concluded, "is equivalent in every way to the right of the existing [Palestinian] population to live there." Furthermore, as Stephen Schwebel, a judge on the International Court of Justice between 1981 and 2000, explicitly noted, territory acquired in a war of self-defense (as waged by Israel in 1967) must be distinguished from territory acquired through "aggressive conquest" (as by Germany during World War II). Consequently, the provisions of the

Mandate for Palestine, allocating all the land west of the Jordan River to the Jewish people as their national homeland, remained in force until sovereignty was finally determined by a peace treaty between the contending parties—now Israel and the Palestinians. Until then, the disputed West Bank, claimed by two peoples, remained open to Jewish settlement.

In sum, the right of the Jewish people to “close settlement” throughout Mandatory Palestine, except for the land siphoned off for Transjordan in 1922, has never been abrogated. Nor has the legal right of Jews to settle in Judea (including Hebron) and Samaria, indisputably part of western “Palestine,” ever been relinquished. The persistent effort to undermine the legitimacy of Israeli settlements, according to international law expert Julius Stone, has been nothing less than a “subversion . . . of basic international law principles,” in which the government of Israel, at best ambivalent about the settlements, has often been a willing accomplice. In the continuing absence of a “just and lasting peace,” with an accompanying determination of the scope of Israeli withdrawal from “territories,” Israel is under no legal obligation to limit settlement in Hebron or elsewhere.

To be sure, world opinion insists otherwise. (In his uncritical embrace of Meron’s erroneous conclusion, Gorenberg cites “the court of world diplomacy” as “the court that mattered.”) Since the Six-Day War, settlements have become a politically convenient justification for international hostility toward Israel. A triumphant Jewish state could hardly be expected to win approval for its conquests from Arab neighbors who had opposed its very existence, with or without settlements, long before 1967. Ever since the United Nations decided in 1975 that Zionism was “racism,” the international community has incessantly condemned Israel as the malevolent occupier of Palestinian land. Jewish settlers became the newest incarnation of the diabolical, malevolent Jew of traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes.

World opinion aside, ultimately the most consequential—and acrimonious—struggle over Jewish settlement has been located within the State of Israel. Settlements—none more than Hebron, the only city east of the pre-1967 boundary now inhabited by both Jews and Muslims—have raised deeply divisive questions about the identity of the Jewish state, the meaning of Zionism, and the ultimate borders—both territorial and ideological—of Israel.

The settlement movement, from its inception, constituted “a very successful religious raid into the heart of secular Israel.” Amos Oz, the passionate political voice of the literary left, evocatively described the “blow” to Labor Zionists and kibbutzniks from the new “guiding elite” of settlers after 1967. In his anguished rendering, the traditional Israeli “firstborn”—his own Labor Zionist forbears and contemporaries—had been “swindled” by settlers “who were masquerading in *their* sloppy

jackets, running around on hilltops with submachine guns and walkie-talkies." Photos of Rabbi Levinger and Hanan Porat on the shoulders of their euphoric followers after the establishment of a new settlement in Samaria dramatically affirmed the challenge to secular Zionism posed by religious Zionist enthusiasts.

To be sure, every new Zionist settlement since Rishon l'Tsion in 1882 had been nurtured by the identical impulse: to return Jews to their biblical homeland and, notwithstanding the presence of local Arabs, to settle there. During the Mandatory era, secular Zionists had often built their (illegal) watchtower-and-stockade settlements literally overnight while British eyes were averted. But those days were long gone; the new generation of religious settlers was expected to submit to the authority of the government of the State of Israel, which was at best ambivalent about the forays of religious Jews beyond the 1949 armistice lines. So, after 1967, religious Zionists were castigated for doing what had always defined the essence of Zionism.

Rabbi Levinger, the charismatic leader of the Hebron community, was routinely pilloried as the diabolical genius of the entire settlement movement. "All my ideas are from the Torah," he once explained. "It's not complex. This land is ours. God gave it to us." The "hotbed of fanaticism" in Hebron stoked by Levinger, wrote Israeli journalist Hirsh Goodman in dismay, galvanized an entire generation of settlers. To Amos Elon, Levinger not only was "a master of manipulating" government officials; his "ersatz Zionism . . . has penetrated the moral void in the souls of many Israelis." Only "determined blindness," Israeli novelist David Grossman concluded, could account for the unremitting zeal displayed by Levinger's followers, living "in the heart of Hebron, red-eyed and battered by their drunken senses."

According to American journalist Robert I. Freedman, author of *Zealots for Zion*, Levinger was "Israel's Ayatollah Khomeini," a "black-bearded zealot" whose "gaunt face" seemed "possessed by dreams thousands of years old. . . . He lives by rules that were written during the age of the prophets." Settlement, however, was "a lunatic enterprise," expressing "the sins of occupation" that were severely damaging to Israel's "soul." The usually pro-Israel *New Republic* denounced Levinger as Israel's "foremost religious fascist," the "morbidly ecstatic" settlement leader whose "eyes alight with hatred."

Rabbi Levinger's notoriety even penetrated American fiction. In Philip Roth's *The Counterlife*, published in 1986, Nathan Carnovsky (Roth's fictional doppelgänger) set out for the settlement of "Agor" in the Hebron hills to understand how his brother Henry could possibly have abandoned the abundant pleasures of his New Jersey family, mistress, and dental practice to become a settler. Henry, Nathan discovered, had fallen

under the diabolical spell of Rabbi Mordecai Lippman, a thinly disguised amalgam of Rabbi Levinger and Rabbi Meir Kahane, leader of the militant right-wing Kach Party, some of whose political activists lived in Hebron.

On their way to Agor/Hebron, Nathan's friend Shuki, a typical deculturated secular Israeli from Tel Aviv, described the rabbi's perverse pleasure when he "drives into Hebron with his pistol and tells the Arabs in the market how the Jews and Arabs can live happily side by side as long as the Jews are on top. He's dying for someone to throw a Molotov cocktail. Then his thugs can really go to town." To Shuki, "These settlers . . . are our great believing messianic Jews. The Bible is their *bible*—these idiots take it seriously. I tell you, all the madness of the human race is in the sanctification of that book. Everything going wrong with this country is in the first five books of the Old Testament." As far as Shuki was concerned, if Jews "want so much to sleep at the biblical source because that is where Abraham tied his shoelaces, then they can sleep there under Arab rule."

Henry tried valiantly but in vain to gain his brother's understanding for his stunning decision to abandon the comforts of New Jersey for the perils of Hebron: "We are Jews, this is Judea, and the heart of Judea is Abraham's city, Hebron." Sensing Nathan's skepticism, he became more insistent: "You don't get it, this is where the Jews *began*, not in Tel Aviv but here. . . . *This is Judaism, this is Zionism, right here where we are eating our lunch!*"

Nor was Nathan persuaded by their meeting with Rabbi Lippman, whose face had "the sardonic mobility that comes from peering nobly down upon self-deceiving mankind from the high elevation of Hard Truth." The rabbi referred scornfully to Tel Avivians as "weak," "soft," and inclined "to call their cowardice Jewish morality"—they were "Hellenized Jews" with "European ideas." In the Hebron hills, Roth concluded, lurked "the heart, if not of darkness, of demonic Jewish ardor" with its "militant zealotry."

The demonization of Rabbi Levinger framed the indictment of Hebron settlers, and by extension the entire settlement movement, for elevating religious fanaticism above secular rationality. The parameters of hostile journalistic criticism of Hebron settlers—in the United States as in Israel—were set early and endlessly reiterated. After the 1980 murders outside Beit Hadassah, *New Republic* literary editor Leon Wieseltier conceded to Jews the "fine right to pray" in Machpelah. But the Hebron settlers' "passions were ridiculous, their program was indefensible." He condemned their "religious fervor," which must inevitably lead to "irrationality, violence," and death. Wanting "what God promised," Hebron settlers drew on "a fund of febrile religious sentiment" to stake their claims. Dismissing the settlements as "hollow things—makeshift encampments with a few

babies and a few rifles”—Wieselstier, with palpable eagerness, anticipated their early demise.

Hebron’s ideological poison, according to Israeli journalist Hirsh Goodman, was being transmitted to a younger generation of settlers “who have been taught in the name of God to hate Arabs with the same passion as to love *Eretz Yisrael*.” (Goodman’s secular son had demonstrated his own love for Israel by leaving the country to manage a safari lodge in Africa.) Presiding over “a reign of terror” in Hebron, Gideon Levi wrote in *Haaretz*, Jews had become “violent lords of the land” who perpetrated “horror” on Palestinians and whose young children inflicted “mini-pogroms” on their Arab counterparts.

Hebron Jews confounded visiting journalists who could not fathom their religious values. Contrasting Jewish “settlers” with Arab “residents,” Jeffrey Goldberg of the *New Yorker* was incredulous to discover that Jewish parents would raise their children in Hebron. He asked Anat Cohen how she could permit her son to “play amid the barbed wire and soldiers and barricades, and with snipers in the hills above.” She bluntly replied, “Hebron is ours. Why shouldn’t he play?” “Because,” Goldberg responded, “he could get killed.” She countered, “At least his death here would sanctify God’s name.” Goldberg concluded that Cohen (whose brother Gilad Zar, the security chief for settlements in Samaria, had been murdered by Arab terrorists three years earlier) suffered from “a Moriah complex,” a malady that expressed “a Jew’s absolute devotion to even the most inexplicable and cruel demands of God.”

Settler women, with their combination of “feminism and fundamentalism,” baffled and infuriated critics. Hebron mothers were routinely castigated for their religious fanaticism and shocking neglect of their children’s safety. Writing in *Lords of the Land* about the murder of Shalhevet Pas, Zertal and Eldar blamed her death on her family, who “preferred to endanger her life and live outside the recognized, sovereign borders of Israel.” About the Palestinian terrorist who murdered her, they had nothing to say.

Perhaps the nadir of journalistic animosity—and mendacity—toward Hebron settlers came from *Haaretz* reporter Amira Hass. The recipient of various human rights and freedom prizes, Hass had lived in Gaza before moving to Ramallah in 1997 to become the only Israeli journalist residing among Palestinians. If there was any lingering doubt about the intrusion of political bias into her journalism, it vanished in 2001 when she reported that Hebron Jews had kicked, spit on, and danced around the corpse of a wanted Palestinian terrorist. After television footage undermined the veracity of her account, an Israeli army investigation determined that her accusations were false. When *Haaretz* refused to provide a written apology, the Hebron Jewish community sued. The Jerusalem District

Court, ruling that Hass's false report had damaged its reputation, ordered *Haaretz* and Hass to pay 250,000 shekels (nearly \$80,000) to the community for slander.

The trail of vilification blazed by journalists has by now attracted scholars. Howard Sachar, author of a respected history of Israel, brusquely dismissed settlers as "fanatics" and "zealots." Hebrew University political scientist Zeev Sternhell, asserting the indivisible unity of Zionism and secular liberalism, deplored the convergence of religion and politics in the "historical disaster" that the settlement movement represented. He excoriated Hebron Jews, whose settlement is "a national disgrace, a genuine sin and crime: Apartheid . . . is already here." Secular Israelis, he noted with evident approval, were forging a Western-style identity "detached from the mystical ramifications of religion and the irrational side of history."

The choice, asserted Dartmouth College professor Ian Lustick in his study of Jewish fundamentalism, was between a "highly parochial brand of Jewish redemptionism" and "Western liberal/democratic values." The government of Israel must be willing "to use tough, possibly ruthless methods" against its dangerous fundamentalist opponents (a curious recommendation, indeed, from a defender of liberal democratic values). In the end, Lustick insisted, nothing was more important for Israel—not even its Jewish identity—than its special relationship with the United States. Only a "cluster of democratic, libertarian, and universalistic values" could bind the two nations. Jewish fundamentalism, driven to achieve "Jewish rule over the whole Land of Israel," must be stifled.

Israeli political scientist Ehud Sprinzak conceded that the theology of Rabbi Kook, the modern prophet of religious nationalism, was "distinguished by its great respect for the State of Israel and its institutions" (not least, in Kook's judgment, because they represented divine will). But with its "intense paranoia," Sprinzak wrote, the political right from which the settlement movement emerged after the Six-Day War perceived any relinquishment of land as evidence of government illegitimacy, which implicitly justified its own rejection of the rule of law. Its combination of "ultranationalism, militarism, ethnocentrism, and religiosity," Sprinzak concluded, rendered its beliefs "incompatible with modern democratic principles."

For Michael Feige of Ben-Gurion University, the Hebron-Kiryat Arba settlement formed "a political-ritualistic enclave" that emerged from imperial conquest. Feige attributed to settlers "an orientalist viewpoint of the natives as enchanting yet violent primitives"—"a special kind of 'savages.'" Settlers, he suggested, had assumed "a mission (not unlike the 'white man's burden') to salvage [Arabs] from their moral backwardness." Like Indians in the American West, Arabs were perceived as "an immutable enemy, and the only possible option is to fight them."

An essay composed by a Hebron schoolgirl, evoking the haunting Jewish emptiness of Hebron between 1929 and 1967, reminded Feige of “the American frontier, the Wild West,” with Rabbi Levinger charging to the rescue in a *High Noon* scenario as “the sheriff of Hebron.” The girl had written, “The city of the patriarchs is desolate, the houses are broken, the stones are gray.” The only “living sign in the dry desert” came from “howling” cats, “big wild dogs,” mice, rats, and insects. “Then, one day in the year 1968, Rabbi Levinger said, ‘Can I hire your hotel for ten days?’” Her poignant lament over the prolonged banishment of Jews from Hebron was transformed by Feige into the script for a Hollywood western.

To be sure, the history of Arab aggression in Hebron—an unprovoked (why not “Indian”?) massacre in 1929 and the Jordanian (why not “colonial”?) occupation after 1948—needlessly complicated the story of Jewish “expansionist and imperialist” conquest that academic critics preferred to tell. But once settlers recovered from the “trauma” of their inevitable eviction, Feige confidently predicted, their destroyed communities would be replaced by the “post-Zionist, postconflict utopia” that he eagerly anticipated.

Anthropologist Tamara Neuman, professing to be a “potential convert,” had rented an apartment in Kiryat Arba. Given the “xenophobic tendencies” of the community, her dissembling, she claimed in self-justification, offered the only opportunity to gather information about religious nationalism, settlement, and violence in Hebron. Conceding that she “had set out to critique” the settlement, she composed a political polemic in the guise of scholarship. Intending to shift the critical focus from “‘evil’ zealots” to social “processes and structures,” Neuman, like Feige, viewed Kiryat Arba and Hebron through the currently fashionable scholarly lens of colonial domination. Kiryat Arba was “firmly grounded in a colonial enterprise,” aiming “to depopulate areas in order to secure land and property for a project of exclusive nationalist ‘renewal.’” She described the Machpelah enclosure as “Islamic space” under Israeli “colonial regimentation.” Indeed, the entire “Zionist project” had culminated in the “racist underpinnings” and “colonial practices” of the settlements.

A sharp critic of “maternal activism” in Hebron, Neuman was dismayed by “the aggrandizement of the maternal role” that she witnessed there. She accused Hebron women of camouflaging their “inherently violent and aggressive act of land acquisition” with their “domestic plea for the return to ‘lost family.’” Their political assertiveness, she (predictably) insisted, was nothing more than a “project of colonization.”

Critics of Jewish settlement in Hebron, whether implicitly or explicitly, defend exclusive Muslim claims to the city and its (Jewish) holy sites. Patricia Sellick, a political activist with a doctorate in peace studies, recast Hebron as “one of the four holiest cities in Islam” (a fiction conveniently

designed to offset its traditional place among the four holy cities of ancient Israel). Its oldest surviving medieval buildings, she noted, are all Islamic, but she ignored the Herodian enclosure of Machpelah, which antedated the birth of Islam by nearly seven centuries. The return of Jews in 1967 marked the beginning of “abandonment and advancing decay” in the historic old quarter, depleting the Muslim population and leaving behind only “collaborators, drug dealers, and burglars”—and Jews. Then, Sellick concluded, Hebron became a “desolate” city—precisely the observation of Mennonite missionary Ida Stoltzfus before 1967 when Hebron was still under Jordanian rule and no Jews lived there.

In his study of “Holy Landscape,” W. J. T. Mitchell, a professor of English and art history at the University of Chicago, set out to compare “Israel, Palestine and the American Wilderness” (an appealing trope to some academic scholars, who can lacerate two cultures for the price of one). Based on observations from a single visit, Mitchell concluded that Israel was “an occupying, colonial power, a police state that seemed determined to violate every moral, legal and political principle one might have hoped for from the first modern Jewish state.” Israeli preoccupation with “holy landscape,” he asserted, had transformed a promised land into “an imperial landscape . . . [of] conquest, colonization, and expulsion.”

Mitchell reduced Zionism to “the appropriation of territory under cover of a moral crusade.” He attributed blame for “the ultra-Orthodox ‘colonizing settler’ model,” so vividly on display in Hebron, to the predominance of American immigrants (who, in fact, were only a small minority of settlers). Conquest of the West Bank frontier marked “their fulfillment of an American dream.” Indeed, “making the desert bloom” in Zionist mythology reminded Mitchell of “the landscape imagery of romantic German nationalism” that had been embraced and distorted beyond recognition by Nazis. The German people, after all, had also considered themselves to be “a race unmixed by intermarriage with other races, a peculiar people and pure, like no-one but themselves.”

Scholarship and journalism converged when Idith Zertal, an Israeli historian at the University of Basel, and Akiva Eldar, a veteran columnist for *Haaretz*, coauthored *Lords of the Land*, a venomously hostile indictment of Israeli settlement. They describe the arrival of Jews in 1967 as an “invasion” that quickly became “malignant occupation.” Ever since, settler extremists, declaring “the nullity of the State of Israel,” have “brought Israel’s democracy . . . to the brink of an abyss.”

Zertal and Eldar excoriate the Hebron Jewish community for its “subversion and defiance of the law and Israeli democracy.” (Precisely why Israeli “democracy” could not tolerate religious Zionism is never explained.) Jewish terrorism, they claim (with no supporting evidence), was “nurtured in the classrooms of Hebron’s extremist yeshivas.” As an

afterthought, however, they concede that Jewish settlement after 1967 “was accomplished in ways that the Zionist movement had nurtured and sanctified from its inception.” In the end, Jewish settlers are guilty of being good Zionists—but in a post-Zionist age when settlement has lost its Zionist luster and the religious nationalism that inspired it is abhorrent to secular Israelis.

The rapid ascent of the settlement movement—by the mid-1980s, Sprinzak conceded, it had become “the most dynamic social and cultural force in Israel”—was accompanied by persistent allegations of right-wing lawlessness. In Sprinzak’s judgment, the settlers had provoked a “legitimacy crisis.” Suffering from “an illegitimacy complex,” Gershom Gorenberg concluded, settlers symbolized “the ethic of illegalism,” which elevated patriotism above the rule of law and democratic principles. Citing the irrepressible impulse of settlers to act outside the law, he detected nothing less than “a whiff of a sea breeze carrying smoke from the *Altalena*”—a familiar reprise on the Israeli left, ever since 1948, to any challenge to its own ruling authority. The alternatives, for Gorenberg, were stark: “the settlement imperative” or “democracy.” It was, another critic asserted, “a clash between two world views”: Zionist democracy and settlement theocracy. Israelis must decide between “apartheid with the territories, or democracy without them.”

Yet disregard for law—“stealing chickens from the henhouse,” as Rabbi Yoel Ben-Nun wryly observed—was “a norm the Palmach introduced” when it established new (and illegal) settlements during the pre-state years. In 1968, it was Labor Minister Yigal Allon who bypassed military channels to arrange an “under-the-table” transfer of weapons from Gush Etzion to Hebron. Rabbi Jacob Ariel wrote more bluntly in *Nekuda*, the settlers’ newspaper, “An Israeli state which limits or inhibits the settlement of Israel by its people loses . . . its moral and legal authority altogether.”

The issue of legitimacy erupted after the exposure of the Jewish Underground in 1984. Settlement leaders were themselves sharply divided over the boundaries of obedience. Rabbi Ben-Nun, a Gush Emunim moderate, declared vehemently, “The state is the foundation and the government is the authority for conducting war against Israel’s enemies. There are no private wars, and no rules of war are applicable for a private individual.” Even Rabbi Levinger had attempted to discourage defiance of the law by attributing holiness to the State of Israel, its government, and its people. Indeed, he insisted, the army and police were holy “in a special way” because they “guard the state.” Responding to the guilty verdicts, he declared, “We have to do it from a position of respect for the people, the land, the state and its institutions, especially those that leave us bitter.” After prison sentences were handed down, he asserted, “it is our duty to

remember that the State of Israel and all its institutions, just like her sky, land, and fruits, are all holy.”

Within a decade, however, rabbinical resistance had hardened. At a conference in Kiryat Arba, convened when the Tel Rumeida neighborhood was threatened with evacuation by the Rabin government, rabbis warned against “giving parts of the Land of Israel to non-Jews,” which was “strictly forbidden according to *halacha*” (Jewish law). Former Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren ruled, “As there is a command to settle the land, and the uprooting of settlements is a violation of the commandment, the soldier must not carry out an order to uproot settlements.” Rabbi Avraham Shapira, another former chief rabbi and a spiritual leader of the religious Zionist community, affirmed Goren’s ruling: “The evacuation of a Jewish settlement constitutes an illegal order and soldiers must refuse to carry it out.” The Hebron community issued a “Declaration of Intent,” proclaiming its determination to resist eviction: “The citizens of Hebron will not leave the city of their own free will under any circumstances or for any reason.” Jews, they insisted, retained the “inalienable right” to live in Hebron. The ultimate source of Jewish settlement was nothing less than divine command, whose legitimacy was beyond question.

Lawyer Elyakim Haetzni asserted that if the government agreed to relinquish portions of the biblical homeland to Arab rule, Jews who were faithful to the Land of Israel had the right to resist, even overthrow it, as “an illegal regime.” Haetzni, depicted by one hostile critic as “a secular Khomeini,” sharply warned that if the government attempted to evacuate Jewish settlers from their homes by force, “a civil war will break out.” He insisted, “Even if 100 percent of the Jewish inhabitants of Israel should vote for its separation from the Land of Israel, that ‘hundred percent consensus’ would not have any more validity than the ‘hundred percent consensus’ that prevailed within the people of Israel when it danced around the golden calf.”

There was little patience on the secular left for rabbinic arguments grounded in *halacha* or claims that divine command sanctioned disobedience to civil law. Yet in their rage at settlers, secular critics themselves flirted with undemocratic procedures. In an outburst of fury after the Goldstein massacre, Amos Oz demanded that “racist and bloodthirsty agitations” from settlers be squelched with “an iron fist.” To Ze’ev Chafets, an American-born reporter who had served as Prime Minister Begin’s spokesman, “religious irrationality” was the scourge of Israel. “It’s them or us, our values or theirs,” he warned, “reason and civil authority or religious frenzy and the rule of a junta of holy men and a mob of morons.”

With the surge in Palestinian terrorism during the 1990s, the highly politicized debate over legitimacy intensified. Amid mounting criticism of the Oslo accords, Prime Minister Rabin refurbished charges of incitement

and treason that David Ben-Gurion, his political mentor, had levied against Irgun leader Menachem Begin in 1948. Rabin, who as a Palmach officer had commanded the beachfront assault on the *Altalena*, accused his political opponents of seeking “to topple the government through violence in the streets” and—without presenting a shred of credible evidence—harboring plans “to try to violently take over the government offices.” Rabin became livid when Rabbi Goren and Rabbi Shapira called for defiant conscientious objection to any government orders to evacuate settlers. Labeling the rabbis “ayatollahs,” Rabin asserted, “Whoever calls for conflicts with soldiers does not belong to this people anymore.”

Such inflamed accusations exposed a political double standard running like a fault line through the nation, separating (secular) “Israelis” from (religious) “Jews.” Just a decade earlier, during the Lebanon War, soldiers had been praised in secular left circles for refusing to serve in a war whose legitimacy they questioned—at least in part because it was waged by a right-wing government led by Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon. The political left had not then complained about the perils of disobedience; indeed, antiwar protesters enthusiastically encouraged it.

Nor did conscientious objection seem abhorrent when secular soldiers resisted military service in Judea and Samaria. The tension between duty and conscience had tormented Hebrew University anthropologist Eyal Ben-Ami, who was “deeply troubled by what I saw and felt in Hebron.” He knew two soldiers, refusing “on moral grounds” to serve there, who received one-month jail sentences. Another soldier, who castigated settlers as “crazy,” recounted, “What I’m used to here [in Israel], that is to say, democracy, vanished in Hebron. The Jews there did what they liked . . . there are no rules.” By January 2002, 460 Israeli military reservists had signed a letter stating, “We shall not fight beyond the 1967 borders in order to dominate, expel, starve and humiliate an entire people.” In secular circles, a soldier might justifiably refuse to serve in the “occupied” territories, but it was considered outrageous that a religious soldier would refuse to remove Jews from their homes in Hebron.

A controversial photography exhibit that exposed moral dilemmas of military service in Hebron opened in Tel Aviv in 2004. Titled “Breaking the Silence,” its organizer was a twenty-one-year-old Orthodox dissident with a political agenda. Yehuda Shaul had undergone a “conversion experience” during his yeshiva high school years when he encountered the writings of Yeshayahu Leibowitz, the maverick Hebrew University scientist and philosopher who had achieved national notoriety during the Lebanon War for denouncing the “Judeo-Nazi” mentality of Israeli soldiers. “Something,” Shaul recalled, “made me start to crack.” Tormented by his military experiences in Hebron, he had removed his *kippa*, saying, “My Judaism and the Judaism of the settlers there is not the same thing, I’m not a part of them.”

Why spotlight Hebron? Shaul was asked. "Because I know Hebron," he responded, "because I have a score to settle with it, because it's the essence of the occupation." His exhibit, with photographs gathered from some seventy soldiers who had served in Hebron, settled his score. It also propelled Shaul into a new career as a political activist and tour guide, leading groups of Israeli high school students and foreign visitors to Hebron to instruct them in the malevolent consequences of a Jewish presence in the ancient city of their patriarchs and matriarchs.

But Shaul was hardly representative of the Israel Defense Forces. By 2006, half the young combat officers in the IDF were Orthodox Jews, vastly disproportionate to their percentage in the population. "They do everything willingly, with their entire soul," wrote senior *Maariv* correspondent Ben Caspit. He contrasted their dedication with the indifference of the "First Israel"—the secular middle and upper classes whose privileged sons increasingly rejected national service in Israel to seek personal fulfillment in India, Thailand, and Africa.

The secular rationale for avoiding military service sounded familiarly American: "I'm in favor of individual freedom, of choice, of every person doing what he wants," declared the son of Israeli professional parents. "Why should I serve in the army? It's a waste of my time. I want to do something worthwhile with my life." There were "agonizing tensions," concluded Hebrew University political theorist Yaron Ezrahi, "between the Jewish and the democratic sources of modern Israeli identity." The venerable Zionist "narrative" of state service, he observed from his own vantage point on the political left, now confronted "the internal challenge of the potentially subversive narrative of the individual, subjective self."

Self-designated "human rights" organizations that had become, in effect, Palestinian advocacy groups joined the chorus of castigation of Hebron Jews. *B'Tselem* and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (with Shaul's *Breaking the Silence* tours), relentlessly focused on abandoned homes and stores in the Jewish zone, the better to blame Israel for driving Palestinians away. Ignoring the evident attraction of the economically prosperous Palestinian sector of Hebron (closed to Jews), they castigated Israel for a sustained "process of closures and segregation"—described by one international monitor as "ethnic cleansing."

Israeli "restrictions and prohibitions" may have made it "impossible for Palestinians to renovate and rejuvenate the area" that they had inhabited prior to the Hebron accords of 1997, which divided the city. But it went unmentioned that similar Israeli restrictions and prohibitions also made it impossible for Jews to renovate and rejuvenate their own historic neighborhood. Once they were delegitimated as illegal occupiers of Palestinian land, the removal of Jews from Hebron became a self-evident necessity. In the end, however, Palestinian advocacy groups defended the very

evils they attributed to Hebron Jews—"ethnic cleansing," "transfer," and "apartheid."

By now, the rhetoric of settler illegitimacy is deeply embedded in Israeli secular culture. Especially since the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin, settlers and their supporters have been defamed as subversive enemies of the state—even though Yigal Amir, Rabin's assassin, had not lived in a settlement but in Herzlyia (near Tel Aviv). At the annual memorial gathering on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem marking the thirteenth anniversary of Rabin's death, Defense Minister Ehud Barak declared that "extremists," who had merely been "stray weeds" thirteen years earlier, had now become "cancerous tumors, with dangerous outgrowths." He pledged to "uproot this evil from our midst—with deeds and not with words." Minister Benjamin Ben-Eliezer placed blame for Rabin's assassination in "certain towns and bizarre Messianic circles in Judea and Samaria."

President Shimon Peres castigated "right-wing extremists" as a "violent and dangerous minority," guilty of "incitement," who "boldly defy the state's authority." To maintain Israel as a "democratic Jewish state," Prime Minister Olmert asserted, Israelis must "give up parts of our homeland [biblical Judea and Samaria] for which we dreamt for generations of yearnings and prayers." Peace Now activists carried signs reading, "No settler is my brother." The demonization of the political right, wrote columnist Caroline Glick in the *Jerusalem Post*, ignored reality: "The number of right-wingers who reject the authority of the state or would take the law into their own hands is tiny."

The persistent struggle in Israel over legitimacy is the unresolved legacy of Jewish emancipation. Beginning in France at the end of the eighteenth century and then spreading throughout Western Europe, it enabled Jews to finally leave their ghettos, claim the rights of national citizenship, and redefine their Jewish identity. No longer an inclusive and enclosing religion, Judaism in the West was reformed into decorous synagogue worship. As "enlightened" Jewish secularists separated themselves from "primitive" Orthodox traditionalists, new possibilities emerged for civic freedom and social mobility.

A century later, however, European Jews seemed trapped between the tolerance that encouraged assimilation and the hatred that inspired anti-Semitic pogroms. In response to their plight and in pursuit of the perennial Jewish dream of a return from exile and the renewal of national life, an emerging Zionist movement held out the hope of a revitalized identity—national and secular—in the ancient Jewish homeland. Rejecting the polar evils of assimilation and religion (and, to be sure, capitalism), its fiercely secular socialist leaders dominated Jewish political and civic culture in prestate Palestine and led the struggle for national independence.

Along the way, the sacred sites of Jewish tradition—the Western Wall, *Me'arat HaMachpelah*, and the tombs of Rachel and Joseph—receded from Zionist memory. By 1948, newly sanctified sites—Modi'in, Masada, Beitar, and Tel Hai, where the Maccabees, Zealots, Bar Kokhba, and Joseph Trumpeldor had fought bravely against their enemies—evoked nationalist heroism, not religious piety.

The dominant secular Zionist consensus was shattered by the Six-Day War, which returned Israelis to the biblical homeland of the Jewish people and galvanized a dormant religious Zionist movement. At the moment when Israeli soldiers touched the Western Wall in Jerusalem and opened *Me'arat HaMachpelah* in Hebron to Jewish worshippers for the first time in 700 years, the latent conflict over the Jewish identity of Israel erupted. Israelis who were accustomed to defining Zionist legitimacy within exclusively secular boundaries suddenly confronted a formidable religious challenge.

Secular Zionists experienced the postwar surge of religious nationalism as a declaration of cultural and political war. They wanted nothing to do with religion, rabbis, holy sites, or biblical memory. Settlement in Judea and Samaria came to be perceived as an illegitimate assault on secular Zionist supremacy, equated by its defenders with the integrity of the state. Not long after the renewal of Jewish settlement in the biblical homeland and, at least in part, in reaction against it, a “post-Zionist” consensus, bitterly hostile to anything touching on religious memory, emerged to permeate Israeli intellectual, cultural, and academic elites.

Bible scholars dismissed the texts they studied as nothing more than myths and legends, without any historical veracity. Archaeologists whose discoveries in the early years of statehood had linked Israelis to their biblical past insisted that there was no biblical past—no ancestral burial tombs in Hebron, no slavery in Egypt, no desert wanderings, no conquest, and no King David. Ancient heroes—the Maccabees, Masada “zealots,” and Bar Kokhba—tumbled from their Zionist pedestals. In the “new history,” framed by themes of Israeli imperial domination and colonial exploitation, Zionism was transformed from the solution for Jewish powerlessness into the symbol of Jewish aggression, conquest, and oppression.

The revisionist inversion was striking. For almost a century, historian Anita Shapira writes, the Hebrew Bible was “the identity-defining text of the Jewish society emerging in the land of Israel.” Even for pioneering secular Zionists, the Bible had functioned as “the bridge between past and present,” endowing Jewish nationalism with “a mythological-historical foundation to consolidate its distinctiveness around its ancestral land.” But the actual encounter with the biblical landscape in 1967, Shapira suggests, “destroyed the romance of the Bible” for many Israelis.

Ever since 1967 Hebron Jews, fusing Zionism and Judaism—nationalism and religion—have sharply challenged secular Zionist cultural supremacy. By now, secular Israelis—scornfully dismissive of biblical land promises, emancipated from Jewish memory, and avidly embracing modern Western values—have all but forgotten what Hebron Jews remain fiercely determined to remember.

Afterword: Memory

The astonishing reality, as historian Paul Johnson observed, that “Jews are still in Hebron” more than 3,000 years after Jacob became the last patriarch to be buried in the Cave of Machpelah, is perplexing. Literary critic George Steiner, confessing to his “anguish” over Zionism, nonetheless marveled, “Other faiths, other nations succumb to time and to destruction. Not Judaism.” Why not? Because Judaism, as the writer André Aciman learned while growing up in Egypt, “is founded on the idea of remembering . . . and remembering that you should not forget.”

From its tentative beginnings after the Six-Day War, the return of religious Zionists to biblical Judea and Samaria was driven by “the politics of memory.” Hanan Porat, the exiled child of Gush Etzion who led the return twenty years after its brutal destruction, wrote, “The power of memory . . . was the spiritual focus from which later came the realization of the return home.” The ancient source of this power is the Hebrew Bible. The biblical text, historian Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi observes, “has no hesitations in commanding memory.” Especially in the Book of Deuteronomy, the children of Israel are endlessly admonished to remember their God, their forefathers, their servitude in Egypt, the Sabbath, and the perfidy of Amalek. Confronting his imminent death, Moses exhorted the children of Israel, “Remember the days of old, consider the years of ages past” (Deut. 32:7). Not only was Israel “enjoined to remember,” as Yerushalmi writes. “So it is adjured not to forget”: not the Lord their God, the Covenant between God and the Jewish people, or the commandments revealed at Sinai. “Both imperatives,” he notes, “have resounded with enduring effect among the Jews since biblical times.”

During the early years of Zionist settlement, archaeology encouraged an irrepressible fascination with shards and stones from Jewish antiquity. Digging, as pioneering archaeologist Eliezer Sukenik tried to persuade skeptical kibbutzniks at Beit Alpha (who were inclined to discard the ancient relics they uncovered while constructing an irrigation canal), was a valuable act of “retrieving memory.” During the formative years of Israeli statehood, archaeological discoveries by Yigal Yadin (Sukenik’s son) linked modern Zionists to their biblical forebears. Indeed, his Masada excavations had transformed archaeology into a secular Zionist fetish. But in 1967, Yadin denigrated the sudden burst of euphoric reverence for ancient religious sites as “idolatrous.” For him, as for other secular Zionists, the claims of Zionist memory stopped where Jewish memory began.

Like the Zionist pioneers who built the only state in recorded history to restore itself to national life after 2,000 years, Hebron Jews rebuilt their community on the foundation of memory. But in contemporary Israel, the power of memory has severely atrophied. With Western culture as their inspiration, secular Israelis are inexorably drawn to the exuberant Zionist city of Tel Aviv. There they can literally turn their backs on biblical Judea and Samaria to gaze longingly across the Mediterranean to an imagined future that will finally liberate them from the burdens of Jewish history. Jews who once proudly identified themselves as the people of memory, historian David Gross observes poignantly, now retain “only a faint memory that there *once was* Jewish memory.”

The Hebron Jewish community stands resolutely against the spreading malaise of post-Zionist amnesia. Tenaciously attached to their land and to the biblical text that reveals its sanctity and promise, Hebron Jews are reviled for reasserting ancient claims that secular Israelis now brusquely dismiss as evidence of “fanaticism” and “messianism.” Settlers have been scorned as “fetishizers” for whom “the book [is] the one ultimate reality.” For comfortably middle-class secular Israelis, Hebron Jews, enduring dangers and travails that had once defined the Zionist struggle, are anathema. Yet where else but the Hebrew Bible did even the most resolutely secular Zionist pioneers find authority for the location of their once and future state? If Hebron Jews seem fixated on a specific place, the same can be said of secular Zionists, a century ago, who rejected Uganda, Argentina, and everywhere else for Palestine—biblical Zion—as the only acceptable location for the restored Jewish national home of their dreams.

Not long before his incapacitating stroke in 2005, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon asked *Haaretz* journalist Ari Shavit, “Can you conceive that one day Jews will not live in Hebron? . . . If we were a normal nation, when a visitor arrived here we would take him not to Yad Vashem [the Holo-

caust memorial and museum in Jerusalem] but, rather, to Hebron. We'd take him to where our roots are. . . . No other people has anything like it." Even to live in Tel Aviv, the resolutely secular Sharon asserted, "we need a root in Hebron." As he told biographer Uri Dan, "Everything with us is history. . . . Hebron is part of the patrimony of the Jewish people."

By now, however, many Israelis are exhausted by their unremitting sixty-year struggle for a peaceful, normal life. As Ehud Olmert famously declared in 2005, shortly before replacing Sharon as prime minister, "We are tired of fighting, we are tired of being courageous, we are tired of winning, we are tired of defeating our enemies." Most of all, Olmert might have added, Israelis had grown tired of remembering. Over time, the venerable Zionist dream of reclaiming and resettling the Land of Israel has begun to yield to the yearning for an entrepreneurial paradise, with Israel as the Silicon Valley of the Middle East. Hebrew will still be spoken there, but the Jewish state, to the evident relief of its proponents, will have no discernible Jewish content. While secular Israelis, suffering from post-Zionist amnesia, yearn to emulate the American way, Hebron Jews remember the Jewish past and build the future on the foundation of their memories. They have tacitly assumed responsibility for preserving the collective memory of the Jewish people.

Since its partition in 1997 under the Wye accord, Hebron has become two cities. The Palestinian sector has flourished. With renovations and rebuilding funded by the Aga Khan Development Network, supplemented by generous gifts from European governments, Arab Hebron has experienced unprecedented prosperity. Signs of new construction—homes, office buildings, and mosques—abound. Busy downtown streets are lined with stores that attractively display consumer goods. Bright yellow taxis dart through traffic. *Haaretz* journalist Danny Rubenstein was impressed when he was shown the new central market—clean, organized, and computerized—that had become the pride of the city. "There is nothing as modern and efficient as this in all of Palestine," he enthused. "Not in Jordan, either. Not even in Tel Aviv."

In the tiny Jewish zone, by contrast, the government of Israel has resolutely stifled development and constricted population growth. Nearly thirty years ago, Prime Minister Begin pointedly declared, "There is no impediment to Jews' living in Hebron, like anywhere else in the Land of Israel." Ever since, however, Hebron Jews have confronted stringent restrictions on the growth of their community. While the Palestinian Authority has subsidized the renovation of dilapidated Arab homes in the Jewish Quarter, offering tax exemptions and other incentives to encourage former residents to return there, the Israeli government has denied

funding to Jews, constrained private investors, and challenged real estate purchases in court. Permitting *waqf* property to remain under Muslim religious authority, it has shown no such respect for *heqdesh* (Jewish religious property), even when registered long ago in both rabbinical and *shari'a* courts in Hebron.

Except after fierce settler pressure following Palestinian terror attacks, Israeli authorities have tenaciously resisted the expansion of Jewish Hebron. The High Court of Justice has ruled that for “security” reasons, the Custodian of Absentee Property is under no obligation to return property to its original Jewish owners. Following the construction of a new apartment building on Tel Rumeida in 2001, a delayed response to Rabbi Ra’anan’s murder, no new construction was authorized for seven years. In the summer of 2008, the Defense Ministry finally approved the expansion of a yeshiva dormitory where students had been sleeping fourteen to a room.

Hebron Jews simultaneously confront the hostility of Palestinian Arabs and the obduracy of their own government. The Palestinian conflict, ironically, may be more amenable to resolution. Early in 2008, sheikhs from two prominent Hebron clans met with a delegation of local Jews to explore the possibilities of amicable reconciliation. Greeting their Israeli visitors were Sheikh Abu Hader Ja’bari, nephew of the Hebron mayor who had urged the peaceful surrender of the city in 1967, and Sheikh Abu Akram Abu Sneinah, head of Hebron’s second-largest family clan. In Sheikh Ja’bari’s elegant home, they welcomed Kiryat Arba lawyer Elyakim Haetzni and Mayor Tzvi Katzover, Hebron Jewish community spokesman Noam Arnon, and Hebron military commander Yehuda Fuchs.

The meeting was prompted, ironically, by a simmering dispute between Hebron settlers and Israeli leftists. The settlers had built a small makeshift synagogue on land owned by Sheikh Ja’bari, adjacent to the road linking Kiryat Arba and Hebron, after two Jewish residents had been murdered there by Palestinian terrorists. Repeatedly torn down, the synagogue was always rebuilt. The sheikh, confronting Israeli activists who were determined to destroy it as an illegal “outpost,” had refused to permit the desecration of a house of prayer on his property. In turn, at his request, the Jewish community had called off a mass protest march into the Arab neighborhood of Abu Sneineh following the murder of two off-duty Israeli soldiers hiking near Hebron.

Each community had something to gain from their unusual encounter. Hebron Arabs wanted the Israeli army to open city roads and remove military checkpoints; Hebron Jews wanted to demonstrate that amicable relations between the communities obviated any reason for the government to consider evicting settlers from their homes. In the prevailing spirit of amity, Noam Arnon reminded the gathering that when Muslims

first arrived in Hebron in the seventh century, according to legend, Jews had led them to the concealed entrance of *Me'arat HaMachpelah*, whose location they alone knew, in return for the promise that they could build a synagogue. Sheikh Ja'bari, in turn, assured his Israeli visitors, "This city is ours as it is yours."

Months later, the sole surviving member of a Jewish family that had owned property in Hebron ever since the Spanish expulsion in 1492 asked permission to speak at a hearing before the High Court of Justice. The judges would decide whether several Jewish families could be evicted from his Hebron property, which he jointly owned with an umbrella organization of Sephardic yeshivas. Yosef Ezra, who arrived with registration records to document his family ownership claim, was the seventy-five-year-old son of Yaacov ben Shalom Ezra. They had been the only Jews to remain behind in Hebron—for eleven years—after the final British evacuation of the Jewish community in 1936. Yosef praised Hebron Jews as "true pioneers, among the last who are putting Zionism into practice." In May 2008, a military appeals panel upheld his ownership claim to Beit Ezra—the Ezra house. It was fitting tribute to the fierce resolve of a Hebron father and, seventy years later, his son's tenacious memory.

Israeli courts have occasionally, if reluctantly, recognized the ownership rights of Jews to abandoned Jewish property in Hebron. But the government has made it virtually impossible for Jews to purchase property from willing Palestinian sellers. In 2005, the Hebron community acquired a large four-story building overlooking worshippers' path, where twelve Israelis had been murdered in the deadly terrorist attack three years earlier. Purchased through an intermediary after prolonged negotiations with its Palestinian owner, it commanded sweeping views of the surrounding hills and the city below.

After extensive renovations by the seller and final payment for the nearly million-dollar property, Hebron Jews took possession of their new home in March 2007. As word of the acquisition spread, hundreds of excited yeshiva students and Jewish residents came to explore the premises, dance in celebration—and move in. The building was named "Beit HaShalom," house of peace. Israeli security forces soon arrived to demand copies of the transaction documents, which conferred legal title to the property on the Jewish community of Hebron.

The purchaser, Morris Abraham, was a New York businessman whose paternal great-grandfather and members of his mother's family had lived in Hebron until 1929. His Syrian-born father, who frequently visited Hebron after 1967, had considered other properties for purchase but chose this building to connect Kiryat Arba and Hebron, precisely as Prime Minister Sharon had promised after the 2002 massacre.

Hebron Jews were overjoyed with their new acquisition. Eight families immediately moved in; among them, from the second generation of settlers, was Rabbi Levinger's son Shlomo, with his wife Yesca and their five children. The local Israeli military commander valued the location for his soldiers, who promptly claimed its roof as a superb lookout post. The Supreme Court ordered an investigation of the transaction, but police concluded that all requirements for a legal sale had been met. The Court ordered another investigation, instructing the police to report back within forty-five days. No evidence emerged to invalidate the purchase.

Amid dire Israeli media predictions that Jewish "invaders" with "forged" documents would trigger renewed violence in Hebron, it was a forgone conclusion that Palestinians would exact revenge from the Arab seller once they identified him. Selling property to a Jew is a capital offense in the Palestinian territories (as it is in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere in the Middle East). A year earlier, Fatah gunmen in Jericho had murdered a man for committing that crime. Hearing of the new purchase, a local Hebron Arab told an Israeli radio journalist, "If the Jews really did buy it, all the more power to them. But we will find the seller and chop him up into tiny pieces." Indeed, the middleman for the Arab seller, fearing for his own life, vigorously denied the validity of the sale. But seller Faiz Rajabi had been filmed receiving and counting his proceeds from the transaction.

There were predictable demands from the Israeli left for immediate removal of the new Jewish residents. Meretz Party chairman Yossi Beilin promised to submit a bill in the Knesset calling for the evacuation of all Jews from Hebron. But when a political opponent indicated his intention to introduce an identical bill calling for the removal of all Arabs from Hebron, the Beilin proposal was quickly withdrawn. *B'Tselem* described Beit HaShalom as a "new settlement" that Jews had "invaded." Proclaiming the "illegality, under international law, of Israeli settlements," it insisted, "Israel must evict the occupants immediately, without regard to the question of ownership."

The new residents of Beit HaShalom endured primitive living conditions. Entire families lived in unheated one-room apartments, with nothing but plastic window covers to protect them from severe winter weather. Community leaders applied to the government for a permit on humanitarian grounds to install glass windows, repair the leaking roof, and run electric heating lines for the inhabitants, including one family with seven children—and for the soldiers who protected them. Defense Minister Ehud Barak denied their request; his decision was appealed to the Civil Administration. While the appeal was pending, a fierce winter blizzard blanketed the Hebron region with snow. The government finally relented and approved necessary health and safety renovations.

In mid-November 2008, Attorney General Menachem Mazuz initiated legal proceedings to expel the residents of Beit HaShalom until a lower court finally determined the legality of the sale. In response, the High Court of Justice—reconstituted with a new panel of judges friendlier to the government (the only religious Jew was replaced by the sole Israeli Arab)—authorized Defense Minister Barak to evacuate Beit HaShalom within three days. Signed purchase and sale documents, a video of Palestinian seller Rajabi receiving (and counting) his money, and even a cassette recording of his acknowledgment of the sale to a friend were disregarded. Dismayed by the endless delays, Morris Abraham despaired of “Israeli democracy.” Anywhere else, he said, “when a person purchases private property, his purchase is honored and all procedures are dealt with according to the law.” The Hebron purchase, he insisted, was “kosher.” Government obstruction was for “political reasons.”

With tempers rising and 20,000 visitors expected in Hebron for the approaching celebration of Shabbat *Chaye Sarah*, the evacuation deadline was extended to thirty days. Speaking for the Hebron Jewish community, Orit Struk declared bitterly, “The tens of thousands of people who are expected to arrive in Hebron this Sabbath to commemorate Abraham’s purchase of the Machpelah Cave . . . can take comfort in the fact that when he bought it, there was no Supreme Court, Attorney General or government [of Israel] to take it from him.”

As the deadline neared, residents of settlement outposts in northern Samaria, known as “hilltop youth,” arrived in Hebron to resist the expulsion order. Their presence exacerbated an already volatile situation. Over the objections of Hebron residents, some militant newcomers punctured the tires of police and military vehicles, wounded an IDF soldier by spraying him with turpentine, scribbled graffiti on Palestinian homes and a mosque, and engaged in stone-throwing skirmishes with local Palestinians (during which a sixteen-year-old Jewish boy suffered a fractured skull). Israeli border police and soldiers were summoned to enforce order.

Defense Minister Barak, leader of the Labor Party, decided the merits and timing of a forced evacuation. With national elections looming in two months (and Labor prospects plummeting), Hebron was once again sucked into the maelstrom of Israeli politics. Barak called for everyone “to act responsibly and in accordance with the state’s essence and judicial institutions.” But Rabbi Colonel Moshe Hagar-Lau, head of a nearby premilitary yeshiva, accused Barak of “trying to earn [political] points by clashing with Jews in Hebron.”

Barak, in turn, sounded the familiar warning of Labor Party politicians, as old as Jewish statehood, against “attempts by small groups of radicals to undermine the authority of the state over its citizens.” Prime Minister Olmert, facing indictment for illegal financial activities, proclaimed the

necessity of obedience to the rule of law. President Shimon Peres, citing the authority of David Ben-Gurion, his political mentor, asserted, "Whoever throws a stone at a soldier, it is as if he has thrown a stone at the State of Israel." Six decades later, echoes of the *Altalena* confrontation between the political left and right still reverberated through Israeli politics.

Beit HaShalom, the house of peace, had become the newest flashpoint in the irrepressible struggle over Zionist legitimacy. *Haaretz* journalist Nadav Shragai, denouncing "Jewish fanatics from the fringes of the settler camp" who had come to vandalize Hebron, also sharply castigated government "fanaticism whereby the ends, the banishment of Jews from Hebron, justify nearly all the means." To Benny Katzover, head of the Samaria Settlers' Committee, "the right of Jews to own property in the land of Israel" was in jeopardy. But to the secular Zionist political leadership, the purchase of property in Hebron by a Jew threatened the authority of the state. So, seventy years after the British army had removed Jews from Hebron, Jews once again confronted forcible expulsion from their Hebron homes, this time by the government of Israel.

In early December, meetings between Barak and settlement leaders failed to produce a mutually acceptable solution. The Defense Minister remained unyielding: "The building will be evacuated. The building will be under IDF and state control until the court decides to whom it belongs." On December 4, Israeli security forces stormed Beit HaShalom, dragging residents and their supporters from the building. Predictably, the military assault quickly became a pitched battle, with settlers throwing rocks, eggs, and chemicals at their evictors as soldiers and police fired stun grenades and tear gas at them. Violence spread quickly to nearby neighborhoods, where infuriated settlers and Palestinians pelted each other with stones.

Mutual recriminations erupted instantaneously. Arieh Eldad, Knesset member from the National Religious Party, accused Barak of using force "as part of the left-wing's election campaign." Danny Dayan, leader of the settlement council, insisted, "This could have been done peacefully and legally." Instead, Barak "threw a match in a pile of gun powder." On the left, Meretz Knesset member Avshalom Vilan interpreted the violent confrontation as "a test for the rule of law." An overwrought *Haaretz* journalist described settler violence as a "pogrom," while an enraged editor perceived nothing less than a struggle over "who controls the state: the justice system and a government elected by democratic means, or Jewish terrorism."

To Hebron Jews, however, it seemed that a rule of the political left—no Jew may buy property in Hebron—had supplanted the rule of law. As spokesman David Wilder wrote, "The real danger to Israeli society is not a few dozen kids throwing rocks while violently and illegitimately being thrown out of a home in Hebron. The true threat to our country is the

warping of the fundamental institutions whose presence is supposed to protect the people rather than terrorize them." The government of Israel seemed determined to stifle the Hebron Jewish community, by military force if necessary.

For thirteen centuries, Jews and Muslims have shared a history of precarious coexistence in Hebron. But the more intractable problem of coexistence may be whether secular Zionists can ever accept the legitimacy of their religious nationalist opponents. Launching a vigorous rebellion against the religious faith of their fathers, Labor Zionists had envisioned Jewish secularization as the necessary component of national restoration. Although religious Zionists eagerly adopted the "*Sabra* ideal of settlement, militarism, and activism" after the Six-Day War, their religious passion—and their surging political power during the 1980s—threatened the right to rule that secular Zionists had long claimed for themselves.

Ever since the return of the Labor Party to power under Yitzhak Rabin in 1992 after fifteen years of Likud rule, successive Israeli governments, some more enthusiastically than others, have pursued peace with Palestinians within the framework of the Oslo accords. Before leaving office in 2001, Prime Minister Barak, frantically chasing an agreement with Yasir Arafat, was prepared to relinquish virtually all the territory that Israel had acquired in 1967. Seven years later, as Prime Minister Olmert prepared to depart from office under a cloud of personal scandal and political disgrace, he reiterated the need for Israel to relinquish virtually the entire biblical homeland and empty it of Jews.

The Israeli pursuit of peace with Palestinians must inevitably come at the expense of religious Zionist settlers. This is hardly coincidental. Where Jews now live, a Palestinian state is expected to arise. Jews will once again be deported and transferred, this time by the State of Israel. Abandonment of the biblical homeland will be the price that secular Zionists will gladly pay to finally squelch the challenge of religious Zionism. The *Altalena* episode from 1948 offers a frightening, yet tempting, precedent. That lamentable moment in Israel's history, when Jews fired guns on Jews under the guise of suppressing rebellion, may yet be reprised with the forcible expulsion of religious nationalists from Judea and Samaria—once again in the name of Zionist legitimacy.

With the implementation of "land for peace," tens of thousands of religious Zionists would be torn from their homes, and Israel would relinquish its millennia-old claim to the biblical homeland of the Jewish people. The sacrifice of Judea and Samaria and the accompanying abandonment of *Me'arat HaMachpelah* in Hebron would fulfill the secular Zionist dream of Israeli normalization. Unencumbered by ancient holy sites, Israel could finally become "a nation like other nations," and the legitimacy of secular Zionism as the true faith would be forever secured.

Should that happen, however, it would signal an irreparable loss of Jewish memory, rejection of the authority of sacred texts on which Zionism rests, and relinquishment of nearly a century of international legal guarantees of Jewish settlement west of the Jordan River. With the territorial spoils of its defensive wars discarded and the biblical homeland abandoned, Israel would finally be safe for secular Zionism—within, to be sure, what Foreign Minister Abba Eban once called “Auschwitz borders.”

Whether Zionism retains any connection to the hallowed ancient sources and sites of Jewish history is likely to turn on the fate of the tiny Jewish community in Hebron. Confronting the constant threat of Palestinian terrorism, lacerated by Israeli cultural and intellectual elites, and thwarted by their own government, Hebron Jews are likely to remain under siege, the pariahs of the Jewish people. But for these tenacious Jews, the past has never been “a foreign country.” In Hebron, a community of Jewish memory unlike any other, the past will always be home.

Epilogue

In the gathering dusk of a late October afternoon, not long before sunset and the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, I joined a seemingly endless stream of Jews flowing downhill from Kiryat Arba into Hebron. Men and boys in white shirts and dark trousers and women and girls wearing long-sleeved blouses and ankle-length skirts walked together separately, animatedly talking and gesturing. We passed through parallel lines of Israeli soldiers, in combat readiness, stationed ten yards apart as far ahead as we could see. At intervals by the side of the road, military vehicles, their red lights flashing like lighthouses, demarcated our safe path.

As the road flattened at the bottom of the hill, it turned past abandoned stone houses, many in advanced stages of disrepair. Shops were shuttered closed, their metal gates locked. Hebron seemed desolate, deserted, abandoned. On rooftops and behind the remnants of walls, soldiers watched impassively as we passed. Occasionally, greetings of “Shabbat Shalom” were exchanged.

Rounding a bend, we approached a broad plaza, dense with people, dominated by the massive rectangular enclosure of *Me'arat HaMachpelah*. Its graceful twin minarets loomed high above the ancient Herodian walls. At the far end of the plaza, we were funneled through security gates where soldiers calling out “*neshek? neshek?*” checked for weapons. Climbing a flight of stone steps, we wound our way through a labyrinth of hallways, past antechambers and an open courtyard, into a massive hall. In its center, large marble cenotaphs with dark horizontal stripes marked the burial tombs of Isaac and Rebekah.

Beneath the high vaulted ceiling, facing the elegantly carved ancient wooden *minbar* at one end of the room, I was engulfed by scores of dark-bearded men wearing large white knitted *kippot*. A cluster of rabbinical elders, in black coats and round-rimmed black hats, conversed separately among themselves. Everything seemed starkly black or white, without any intermediate shading or subtlety. It mirrored Hebron itself, where divisions are stark and clear—Israeli or Palestinian, Jew or Muslim, friend or enemy.

In one corner of Isaac Hall, men revolved in a large circle, with hands on each other's shoulders. Their rhythmic, wordless chants reverberated off the ancient stone walls while their circle opened and closed as newcomers joined. After a prolonged moment of self-conscious hesitation, I joined them, drawn into the circle of Jewish memory that we had come to Hebron to celebrate. The next morning, the Torah reading would recount in careful detail Abraham's purchase of a burial cave for Sarah, ever since antiquity believed to be located here, beneath us, at this very spot.

That night in our crowded yeshiva dormitory, too restless for sleep, I had flashbacks to my own persistent fascination with Hebron. It began in 1972, during my first visit to Israel with twenty other Jewish academics. Our group leader, Yehuda Rosenman, was a Polish Holocaust survivor with the passionate conviction that encounters with the real Israel could mitigate conventional academic responses—ranging from sardonic indifference to overt hostility—to the Jewish state. Our typical tourist itinerary took us from Tel Aviv to northern Galilee, from Safed to Jerusalem, and then to the Dead Sea and the fortress ruins at Masada.

The next day, we visited Hebron. A meeting had been arranged with Mayor al-Ja'bari, the canny political survivor who had accommodated himself to the British before 1948, the Kingdom of Jordan until 1967, and the State of Israel since the Six-Day War. It was unclear why we were meeting with him but not with any of the Jewish settlers who had recently moved into nearby Kiryat Arba. I knew little about Hebron or its place in Jewish history. Indeed, like the child at the Passover Seder, I did not even know how to ask.

As our bus wound through the narrow streets of Hebron, we passed Beit Hadassah. Two Israeli soldiers stood guard laconically on the footbridge outside the entrance. It seemed puzzling that we did not pause at the only identifiably Jewish building, if now empty, on our route. A moment later, I caught a glimpse of the enormous rectangular stone enclosure, topped by towering twin minarets, that our guide Tuvia explained marked the burial caves of the patriarchs and matriarchs of the Jewish people. Once again, we did not stop. What fragments of Jewish history, I briefly wondered, were concealed within the walls of these buildings? My curiosity about Hebron increased as Mayor al-Ja'bari, surrounded by

deferential acolytes, deftly evaded questions about Arab-Jewish relations, past or present. Impatiently, Tuvia prompted me, "Ask him about the role of his family in 1929." I did not grasp the implications of the question, but I asked nonetheless. The mayor's mumbled reply was inaudible.

A decade later, I returned to Hebron, this time with a friendly Arab antiquities dealer from the Old City of Jerusalem who had offered to take me on a guided tour of the Machpelah shrine. Ibrahim's generous invitation, coming from a participant in Kathleen Kenyon's landmark archaeological excavations in Jericho, was irresistible. Accompanied by my teenaged son and daughter, we left familiar Israel behind to encounter Arab Hebron, where by now handfuls of Jews lived in Beit Hadassah.

The casbah, where a bustling outdoor market filled a narrow street in the center of the city, was simultaneously fascinating and foreboding. Within its deep shadows, the market stalls were barely illuminated by narrow shafts of sunlight. It teemed with Arab shoppers and echoed with merchants' entreaties. Most of the men wore *keffiyehs*, threadbare jackets, and loose, baggy trousers. An occasional woman, with only her eyes visible behind her *niqba*, darted past the fruit and vegetable stalls. Scattered through the casbah were pairs of Israeli soldiers on patrol. I knew that an Israeli yeshiva student recently had his throat cut and bled to death in this market and that six Jews—the target of Palestinian terrorist fury over the renewed Jewish presence in the city—had been murdered outside Beit Hadassah. As intruders in Muslim space, I wondered who would protect us—Ibrahim, Israeli soldiers, Arabs, anyone—if we confronted danger.

As we climbed the steps to Machpelah, the discomfiting scrutiny of Israeli soldiers made me realize that Ibrahim's presence put us on the wrong side of our Jewish identities. Our American passports testified to our nationality, but I knew that they concealed more than they revealed. Feeling uncomfortably like a spy, I wanted the soldiers to know that while our guide was Arab, my children and I were Jews. In Hebron, I realized, there was no middle ground.

Perhaps because Hebron seemed so impenetrable, it became ever more alluring. I wondered what could explain the fierce determination of Jews to live in such a hostile and dangerous place where so many of their predecessors had been brutally murdered. Would such a closed community welcome an inquisitive outsider who wanted answers to questions still unformed? Although I planned an early return, I was repeatedly thwarted. Once the city was closed for security reasons; another trip was canceled by a blizzard, and still another for Ramadan. Hebron seemed to possess myriad ways to insulate itself from inquisitive strangers.

Finally, with the intervention of a politically influential colleague of an Israeli friend, I had my opportunity. Early one bleak December morning, an army colonel and his driver pulled up to my Jerusalem apartment.

An hour later, we were welcomed into the Kiryat Arba home of a young Israeli woman from Kentucky who graciously provided coffee and conversation. Miriam offered no grand ideology to explain her presence in Kiryat Arba, only that this was the Jewish homeland and her family belonged here, and, in any event, life was now less complicated for her than it had been while growing up as a Jewish girl in Louisville.

Her apartment was small; the living room also served as the nursery for her young infant, who slept in a nearby crib. Classical music played softly; one wall was lined with books, interspersed with photographs of prominent rabbis whom she identified for my military escort. By then I could recognize Rabbi Kook, the inspirational chief rabbi of Palestine during the Mandatory period. Many Jewish settlers, I had learned, were galvanized into activism by his son's prophetic call, a month before the Six-Day War, to remember biblical Hebron.

Our conversational pleasantries were interrupted by the blustery arrival of Rabbi Eliezer Waldman, head of the Kiryat Arba yeshiva and one of the influential leaders in rebuilding the Hebron Jewish community. Stocky, gray bearded, and voluble, he unexpectedly turned out to be my religious Zionist Other. Born in 1936 in Palestine shortly after his family left Czechoslovakia, he had grown up in the ultra-Orthodox enclave of Williamsburg in Brooklyn. Born in Philadelphia the same year, I grew up in the assimilated middle-class Jewish respectability of Forest Hills in Queens. While Rabbi Waldman studied Hebrew texts at the Flatbush Yeshiva, I studied American history and literature at the Horace Mann School. When he returned to Israel to learn in a Bnei Akiva yeshiva, I set out for college in Oberlin, Ohio. At every crucial marker of Jewish identity, aspiration, experience, and commitment, our paths had diverged.

Rabbi Waldman passionately and unequivocally asserted his religious-nationalist principles. If there were illegal Jewish settlements anywhere, he suggested in response to my first question about Hebron, they were to be found in Boston and New York, not in the Land of Israel. Here, no Jewish settlement could be considered illegal. In Hebron, after all, new settlers were merely reclaiming property abandoned in 1929 that rightfully belonged to the Jewish community. A Jewish settlement in Judea or Samaria was no less legitimate than Israel itself, which Rabbi Waldman pointedly identified as the largest Jewish settlement in the Middle East.

I questioned and Rabbi Waldman answered for nearly an hour, until the colonel's driver interrupted to inform us that we must return to Jerusalem ahead of an approaching blizzard. There would be no opportunity that day to visit Hebron. During our drive, the colonel and I discovered that each of us had a grandparent who had grown up in the tiny Rumanian *shtetl* of Piatra Neumts. As so often happened in Israel, I felt circles closing and links connecting.

Not long afterward, I returned to participate in another academic seminar, this one focusing on competing definitions of Jewish identity. Some pointed observations from an eclectic array of speakers illuminated the relationship between religion and nationalism in Jewish tradition. A renegade Hebrew University professor reminded us, "Israel is the national expression of attachment to land based on a religious source." A yeshiva student added, "Judaism is defined by Torah, people and land." And a Maronite priest suggested, "Jewish identity is formed by the link between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel within the framework of the Bible."

While we mulled over the implications of these observations, stunning news broke across Israel. More than two dozen Jewish settlers, including several from Hebron and Kiryat Arba, had been arrested for belonging to an underground group that had planted explosives beneath the cars of Arab mayors and Arab buses, killed three students at the Hebron Islamic College in retaliation for the murder of a yeshiva student in Hebron, and, most astonishingly, developed a plan to destroy the mosques on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Instantly, the morality, to say nothing of the political wisdom, of Jewish settlement in Judea and Samaria came under withering nationwide scrutiny.

After the seminar concluded, I returned to Kiryat Arba to renew contact with Rabbi Waldman. Here, if anywhere, the arrests had hit with stunning impact. The target of scathing criticism from outsiders and palpable self-scrutiny within the settler community, the Underground called into question the legitimacy of the entire settlement movement. Seated at a table in his study, the rabbi carefully differentiated between "understanding" the settlers' actions and "justifying" them. Indeed, when consulted about the Temple Mount plan, he had insisted, "Nothing would hurt us more. Rebuilding the Temple is a Godly matter." Yet the Temple Mount, he noted bitterly, is "the only place in the world where Jews cannot pray." The Israeli government, he added, "puts us to shame." It was not enough for settlers to be told by Defense Minister Moshe Arens that "you are *halutzim* [pioneers]; you must suffer." If the government would not protect them, Rabbi Waldman asserted, it should remove them.

The next morning, I read a newspaper article by Elyakim Haetzni, a Kiryat Arba lawyer and another founder of the Hebron community. He sharply condemned "the religious deviation" of attempting to hasten the arrival of the Messiah with guns and dynamite. In the Land of Israel, Arabs may be *gerim* (strangers), just as Jews once were strangers in Egypt, but their lives must be protected. He excoriated rabbis who had failed to admonish their followers, "Thou shall not kill."

The spiritual challenge to secular Zionism posed by religious settlers and the murderous actions of extremists among them raised fundamental

questions about the identity of the Jewish state and the future of the settlement movement. Hebron was at the epicenter of this acrimonious struggle. To secular liberal Israelis, as daily newspaper reports incessantly revealed, the Hebron Jewish community symbolized everything they despised about the settler movement: its religious zeal and arrogant assertion that it was the rightful inheritor of Zionist tradition. Headlines suggested that the intense debate over the future of the settlements might determine whether Israel was truly a Jewish state—or merely a state of Jews.

Some months later, during another sabbatical year in Israel, I once again set out to visit Hebron. By then, the West Bank had become a virtual war zone, with frequent Palestinian attacks on Israeli vehicles and their occupants. Driving south from Jerusalem, my guide Dov maintained close radio contact with settler security headquarters. His car had protective plastic windows, and his pistol was in the glove compartment. Perhaps to ease the tension, Dov told the apocryphal story about Henry Kissinger after his term as secretary of state had ended. In his new job as manager of a zoo, he had finally discovered how to get the Arab lion to lie peacefully with the Israeli lamb. An astonished visiting diplomat asked Kissinger to explain this remarkable achievement. “Don’t tell anyone,” the former secretary of state whispered, “but I change lambs every morning.” Nearing Hebron, I tried to appreciate Dov’s gallows humor.

Accompanied by Mischa, our gruff but friendly escort from Kiryat Arba, we drove into Hebron, past the looming Machpelah enclosure, along narrow streets bordering on the casbah, to the restored Avraham Avinu quarter. The synagogue had only recently been rebuilt after decades of desecration, neglect, and, finally, destruction. Soldiers guarded the entrance; others were stationed on a nearby roof. Standing with the market behind us, Mischa provided some historical information. It made me uneasy to realize that three Jews wearing *kippot*, with their backs turned, might be tempting targets. How easy it would be for someone to pull a knife or throw a Molotov cocktail before disappearing into the casbah. It would not be the first time that had happened in Hebron.

I was relieved to finally enter the synagogue, where Mischa recounted the horrors of the 1929 massacre, the compulsory evacuation of survivors by the British, and the more recent murders of yeshiva students. But he also reminded us of the Arab sheikh who took Jews into his home to protect them and, nearly forty years later, led Jews back to the ruins of Avraham Avinu, its floor covered with excrement. Mischa opened the *aron* to display Torah scrolls enclosed in the beautiful wooden cases that are customary in Sephardic synagogues.

On our way to Beit Hadassah, which I had last glimpsed from a bus window nearly fifteen years earlier, Mischa updated me on its recent history. By now, it had become home for a dozen Jewish families whose

young children darted playfully through the spacious entrance hall. As we walked along the narrow balcony that surrounds the building, Mischa pointed to adjacent houses, now vacant, where Jews once had lived but now were excluded by the Israeli government. The message was evident: just as the Avraham Avinu synagogue had been restored for Jewish worship and the old Beit Hadassah medical clinic had been reclaimed for Jewish occupancy, so other property would be returned to Jewish habitation. I was beginning to learn about the fierce tenacity of Hebron Jews, still attached by an umbilical cord of memory to biblical antiquity and to their own history in this beleaguered city.

Leaving Beit Hadassah, we wound our way up the hill to Tel Rumeida, the likely site of biblical Hebron. On the hilltop, in the newest cluster of Jewish homes, half a dozen small caravans housed Jewish families. As we arrived, a young Orthodox man stepped outside. After brief introductions, Chaim invited us for conversation and refreshment. It was a pleasure, he assured us; it is, after all, in the tradition of Abraham to welcome strangers in Hebron. I asked him why he lived here, in such a dangerous place, surrounded by so many hostile Arabs. Because, he responded, Jewish history began here. "The tree with the deepest roots," he explained, "is the strongest tree."

Hebron, I had learned, is layered with competing historical memories and religious claims that can be traced back to the biblical rivalry between Abraham's sons Isaac and Ishmael. Here several hundred Jews tried to live normal lives. But if threatened or attacked, they would respond in kind; in Hebron, justice still meant *ayin tachat ayin* ("an eye for an eye"). Did it matter that Jewish history, as Hebron Jews invariably remind visitors, began here? If not, why did it matter that the Jewish state be built in the Land of Israel rather than in Africa or South America? Can a people ever relinquish the attachments formed by its deepest memories?

When these glimpses of my previous visits to Hebron finally subsided, I slept fitfully. We returned to Machpelah for the morning service, with the reading of *Chaye Sarah* that 20,000 people had come to Hebron to hear. Recounting a simple real estate transaction, *Chaye Sarah* irrevocably connects Jews to their promised land—and to Hebron. Inside the densely packed Isaac Hall, there was a surge of anticipatory excitement. When the Torah scroll was removed from the *aron* and carried through the room to be reverently touched and kissed, it pulled everyone forward like a magnet. A cluster of rabbis and community elders gathered at the *bima*. I edged as close as I could get to the reader, whose strong voice began to chant the opening words:

Sarah died in Kiryat Arba—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan. (Gen. 23:2)

With his purchase of a grave site, Abraham became a landholder, with legal rights of inheritance that his descendants would claim, in perpetuity:

So Ephron's land in Machpelah, near Mamre—the field with its cave and all the trees anywhere within the confines of that field—passed to Abraham as his possession. . . . And then Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre—now Hebron—in the Land of Canaan. (Gen. 23:17–20)

Chaye Sarah recounts the precise moment when the attachment of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel and to Hebron was forever sealed. Its annual reading affirms the unbroken link of identification between present and past. That morning in Hebron, the power of the deepest historical memory of the Jewish people was palpable. I was standing on the bedrock of Jewish history, directly above the burial cave in the field of Machpelah, in Hebron, in the Land of Israel, as it is described in the biblical text. At this most venerable yet vulnerable Jewish holy site in the world, I felt enclosed, for that moment, within a community of Jewish memory.

If the Hebrew Bible is the ultimate source for Zionism, as David Ben-Gurion affirmed to British royal commissioners some seventy years ago, then Zion surely includes Hebron. Once Jews relinquish their right to live in Hebron, they implicitly undermine their claim to live anywhere in their biblical homeland. To abandon Hebron is to surrender the claims of memory that bind Jews to each other, to their ancient homeland, and to their shared past and future.

Jewish prayer resonates with pleas from the prophet Jeremiah for the return of his people “within our borders.” Immediately preceding the affirmation of the *Sh'ma*, Jews recite, “Bring us in peacefulness from the four corners of the earth and lead us with upright pride to our land.” During the concluding *Musaf* service, Jews implore God to “bring us up in gladness to our land and plant us within our boundaries.” These ancient religious pleas, as it happens, also define the essence of Zionism. For the Jews of Hebron, Judaism and Zionism are inseparable. In Hebron, in *Me'arat HaMachpelah*, on Shabbat *Chaye Sarah*, an exuberant community of religious Zionists revealed the enduring power of Jewish memory.

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INTRODUCTION

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Acknowledgments

During visits to Hebron and Kiryat Arba over a twenty-five year span, I was invariably welcomed with generous hospitality and illuminating conversation. I am especially grateful to David and Ora Wilder, who graciously opened their Beit Hadassah home to me. Amid incessant demands on his time, David kindly scheduled interviews, drove me to my destinations, and guided me through Jewish Hebron. I also wish to thank Rabbi Eliezer Waldman, Elyakim Haetzni, Sarah and Baruch Nachshon, and Shlomo Levinger, who invited me into their homes, recounted their experiences, and patiently answered my questions. Noam Arnon was my guide in *Me'arat HaMachpelah* and introduced me to Rabbi Moshe Levinger for a brief but illuminating conversation with the founding father of the Hebron Jewish community. Numerous other residents of Hebron and Kiryat Arba, whom I knew only by their first names, were welcoming and helpful.

At critical points during the transformation of an idea into a book, scholars and friends offered guidance, suggestions, and encouragement. My thanks to Professor Jon D. Levenson of Harvard University, Professor Marc Z. Brettler of Brandeis University, Professor Neil Hecht of Boston University Law School, and Professor Hanina ben Menahem of the Hebrew University Law School. None of them, of course, is in any way responsible for what I have written. Martin Abramowitz, Harvey Bock, and Bob Jampol suggested important sources and provided helpful information. More than thirty-five years ago, Yehuda Rosenman's academic seminar, sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, brought me to Hebron for the first time, implanting questions that have lingered ever since.

Helen Freedman led a memorable Americans for a Safe Israel (AFSI) visit to Hebron for Shabbat *Chaye Sarah* in 2002. Once again Professor Edward Alexander facilitated my passage into print, for which I am deeply grateful. My thanks to the anonymous readers who responded positively to my analysis and offered valuable suggestions for strengthening it.

Wellesley College generously funded research travel, translation costs, and other expenses of publication. Wellesley students Elian Rosenfeld (Class of 2007), Yael Misrahi (Class of 2010), and Michal Bornstein (Class of 2011) were immensely helpful Hebrew translators. Ekta Ghimire (Class of 2009) kindly tolerated my interruptions to scan photographs. College librarians were exceedingly accommodating in locating elusive texts and facilitating a steady stream of interlibrary loans. My appreciation to those who granted permission for me to reprint photographs: Sharon and Einat at the Israel National Photo Collection, Ely Schiller, Yoad Avissar, Asher Koralek, and Getty Images. Over the years, my gestating ideas about Hebron Jewish settlement appeared in *Midstream*, *The Jewish Advocate*, *Jewish Spectator*, *Sh'ma*, and *Outpost*. At the generous invitation of Congregation Ohr Kodesh in Chevy Chase, Maryland, I delivered the Anne F. and Julius Schlezinger Memorial Day Lecture in 2007, "The Cave and the Grave: Law, Land and Memory in Jewish History."

During frequent visits to Israel, I have always been the beneficiary of the loving kindness of Haggai and Adina Hurvitz. Ever since we were colleagues at Tel Aviv University during 1974–1975, Haggai has encouraged my idiosyncratic wanderings while demonstrating exemplary tolerance (so far, at least) for the ideas and conclusions that I have extracted from them. Whenever I needed an interpreter of Israeli history, culture, or politics, he offered wisdom, insight—and friendship. But I alone am responsible for what is written in these pages. Nimrod Hurvitz, who did his best to enlighten me about contemporary Israeli politics and scholarship, is not to be blamed for any remaining deficiencies. In Jerusalem, Moshe and Chava Wagner always welcomed, fed, and encouraged me. Back home, over many decades, Michael Rosenthal, Michael Meltsner, Stanley Fisher, and Daniel Horowitz have been steadfast friends. For nearly twenty years, walks, talks, and bike rides with Bill Novak and Irle Goldman have deepened our friendships. Nathan Ehrlich and Joel Leeman were generously helpful in their own areas of knowledge and expertise.

For as long as Jewish history unfolds in the Land of Israel, the Hebron Jewish community is likely to remain part of it, as it already has for 3,000 years. Others, I hope, will continue to tell its story. But the writing of this book had to end in December 2008. At Rowman & Littlefield, which took over from there, Sarah Stanton expertly—and patiently—provided everything I could have wanted from an editor. I appreciate her strong support and helpful answers to my incessant questions. Melissa McNitt

guided the manuscript (and me) through production. Copy editor Bruce R. Owens and indexer Jennifer Rushing-Schurr contributed their valuable skills.

Once again, my wife Susan (whose valiant assistance with onerous computer tasks preserved my sanity on numerous occasions); my daughters Pamela, Shira, and Rebecca; my grandchildren Cole, Dalia, and Jonah; even Gingi and then Pasha, lovingly sustained me during my long spells of scholarly solitude. I especially appreciate the generosity of my son Jeffrey, who set aside his own scholarly deadlines to give me a painstakingly detailed and immensely valuable critical evaluation of the entire manuscript. I alone am responsible for the result, but his contribution elicits deeper gratitude than I can possibly express.

J.S.A.

December 2008/ Kislev 5769

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