



A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

by Shlomo Dalezman



In honor of *Parshat Chayei Sarah*, four Orayta guys and myself spent that *Shabbat* in *Chevron*, at *Ma`arat Hamachpelah*, the burial cave of our forefathers and mothers. Originally, we were going to pitch a tent in a field and sleep outside the cave. However, upon arrival at *Kiryat Arbah* (the Jewish town next to *Chevron*), we realized that it might not be such a good idea. Therefore, we decided to pay 10 NIS to sleep at a middle school in *Kiryat Arbah*.

In order to walk to *Ma`arat Hamachpelah* from *Kiryat Arbah* we had to walk through *Chevron*. It was as if we were walking in a documentary about a war ravaged city in the Middle East. There were soldiers placed about every 100 meters, and an army or police vehicle would drive by every couple of minutes. There was litter on the side of the road and a pungent, disgusting aroma that makes you sick. There were run down buildings with missing windows. It was eerie seeing soldiers in the window blocs. Those window blocs would have been a perfect place for a sniper to be hiding. Fortunately we had the Israeli army to protect us.

When we arrived at the *Ma`arah* I was suprised to see what I saw. I thought there would be many more Jewish Israeli's. However, the crowd was composed almost entirely of American Jews. Moreover, I was surprised that the awful smell that permeated the Arab part of *Chevron*, had disappeared. Additionally, there were beautiful parks of grass and flowers surrounding the *Ma`arah*, something that was missing in the desolate walk through *Chevron*.

We decided to *daven* at a *minyan* inside the *Ma`arah* itself. It was an intense experience. It took us about 15 minutes to get inside the actual *Ma`arah* because of the throng of people. We *davened* by the grave of Abraham, and it was a very spiritual experience, not just because I felt a natural spirituality there, but because the people there made the atmosphere spiritual. The spiritual experience was so much more incredible and beautiful than a natural spiritual experience, because we made the experience; we defined it.

Afterwards, we returned to the middle school to eat the dinner that we had brought with us. We made ourselves a make-shift table out of school desks,

and held a small *tish* (minus the singing part), with other guys from other *Yeshiva's*.

As normal teenagers without alarms, we awoke at 11 A.M. Luckily we were still able to catch a late *minyan* at the *Ma`arah*. The morning service was additionally an incredible experience. This service was a much more personal experience, compared to the evening service, as it was an eighth of the size.

Staying in *Chevron* for *Shabbat* was an interesting experience. I cannot say that I felt more connected, praying at the graves of our forefathers and mothers. However, it was a different experience to what I have ever had before. It is these experiences that we will remember for years to come.