When the floodwaters came upon the earth, nothing remained alive except Noah and those with him in the Ark. They were protected because of G-d’s mercy – “for Noah found favor in His eyes.” Noah’s Ark has therefore come to symbolize a safe haven in a volatile world. But the physical Ark is lost to mankind and nor was it meant to be an object of pilgrimage.

Like Noah’s Ark, Chevron’s Tomb of the Avot and Imahot (Forefathers and Mothers) is a haven from the vicissitudes of a turbulent world. Yet unlike the Ark, the “Machpelah” is a physical place to visit – one which imbues its visitors with a sense of permanency and stability in the tumultuous universe and our fleeting existence. That is because the values of the Avot and Imahot are anchors in a world of constantly changing attitudes and values. G-d’s promise to the Avot is a recurring and foundational theme in the Torah and is a bond that can never be abrogated.

This eternal imprint is the power behind the sense of peace and stability at the Machpelah.

Moreover, the Machpelah building itself has a feeling of permanency. Unlike other structures from the period, the monumental Herodian building that sits atop the tombs has never been destroyed. It has been added to and altered but the basic structure remains the same.

The Herodian edifice of the Tomb of the Avot and Imahot is the world’s oldest standing structure that has continuously served its original purpose – a place to pay homage to the founders of ethical monotheism and the first family of the Jewish nation. Compare that to the most sacred site to the Jewish people – the Temple Mount – which was sacked by the Romans, a small part of which – the Western Wall – continues to be an epicenter of pilgrimage for Jews and gentiles around the world.

Yet the permanency of the Machpelah stands in contrast to the political and social reality that has swirled around it. Since the destruction of the Second Temple, the site has been under the dominion of the Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Crusaders, Mamluks, Turks, British and the Jordanians. Nevertheless, Jews and followers of Avraham have flocked to the site at different times and under varied conditions and always found comfort and unbounded strength.

Like Noah’s Ark, the Machpelah also carries the theme of family. “Two by two,” male and female, did the animals come into and out of the ark. So too, the Machpelah is a place of couples – Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka, Ya’akov and Leah, who came together as a family to give birth to a nation. The family bond, the bonds of love, and tribal values also give the Tomb its vitality and sense of eternal stability.

And speaking of tumultuous – the world today seems to be experiencing some kind of flood-like cataclysm. From divisive elections, riots and antisemitism in the US, to combative Israeli politics and of course the Coronavirus.

Yet, with all the balagan (mess or chaos), one light is shining bright – the nascent diplomatic relations between Israel and regional Arab states including the UAE, Bahrain and others. These are beautifully called the “Abraham Accords” – a name that recalls the father of the children of Israel and the children of Yishmael. It was in Chevron that Yitzchak and Yishmael came together to bury and honor their shared father Avraham – and it was then that Yishmael, the father of the Arabs, repented.

Chevron, the City of Avraham, and the Tomb of Avraham within it, should be viewed as a meeting place for all those who love Avraham and walk in his path of worshiping the One G-d. Soon, G-d willing, the House of Israel, the House of Saud, and all of the children of Avraham, physical and spiritual, will come together in Chevron to find common ground and to move forward in peace and prosperity.

But until that time, Am Yisrael will continue to stand strong to protect the Tomb of the Avot and Imahot, which like Noah’s Ark, protects us throughout time.

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