

EIKEV

THE SPIRITUAL BEAUTY OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

As *Bnei Yisrael* prepare to settle the Land promised to their forefathers, Moshe Rabbeinu describes the formula for success which is to trust in Hashem. In addition, he declares that if they are faithful to the Torah and *mitzvos*, they will prosper and enjoy abundant blessings of the Land. *Parashas Eikev* also contains the second chapter of the *Shema*, which describes the rewards for performing the commandments (physical bounty) and the consequences of disregarding them (famine and exile).

The text places noticeable emphasis on the Land of Israel itself, both at the beginning of the *parashah* and at the end. The first *aliya* concludes with the following verses:

כי ה' אלוֹקֵינוּ מִבֵּיאֵךְ אֶל אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה אֶרֶץ נַחֲלֵי מַיִם עֵינֹת וְתֵהֱמָת יֵצְאִים בְּבִקְעָה
וּבְהָרָה. אֶרֶץ חֹטֵה וְשַׁעֲרָה וּגְפֹן וְתַאֲנָה וְרִמּוֹן אֶרֶץ זֵית שֶׁמֶן וְדִבְשׁ. אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר לֹא

במסכנת תאכל בה לחם לא תחסר כל בה ארץ אשר אבניה כרוזל ומהרריה תחצב נחושת. ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה' אלקיך על הארץ הטבה אשר נתן לך.

Because Hashem, your God, is bringing you to a good land. A land with streams of water, of springs and underground water emerging in the valley and in the mountain. A land of wheat, barley, grape, fig and pomegranate; a land of oil-olives and date honey. A land where you will eat bread without poverty – you will lack nothing there. A land whose stones are iron and from whose mountains you will mine copper. You will eat and you will be satisfied and bless Hashem, your God for the good land that He gave you.¹

The word ארץ appears seven times in this passage, highlighting the centrality of the Land. In fact, a wealth of commentary has been written about the repetition in this section praising the fertility of the Land.

Furthermore, though this description seems complete on its own, the Torah describes the Land again, later in the *parashah*.

ולמען תאריכו ימים על האדמה אשר נשבע ה' לאבותיכם לתת להם ולזרעם ארץ זבת חלב ודבש. כי הארץ אשר אתה בא שמה לרשתה לא כארץ מצרים הוא אשר יצאתם משם אשר תזרע את זרעך והשקית ברגלך כגן הירק. והארץ שאתם עברים שמה לרשתה ארץ הרים ובקעת למטר השמים תשתה מים. ארץ אשר ה' אלקיך דרש אתה תמיד עיני ה' אלקיך בה מרשית השנה ועד אחרית שנה.

And so that you will prolong your days on the Land that Hashem swore to your forefathers, to give to them and to their offspring – a land flowing with milk and honey. Because the Land to which you come to possess it, is not like the land of Egypt, that you left from there, that you would plant your seed and water it on foot like a vegetable garden. But the Land to which you cross over to possess it is a Land of hills and valleys; from the rain of heaven it will drink water. A Land that Hashem your God constantly seeks out; the eyes of Hashem your God are on it, from the beginning of the year to year's end.²

¹ *Devarim* 8:7-10.

² *Devarim* 11:9-12.

It is interesting to note that this second passage focusing on the Land is immediately followed by the second paragraph of the *Shema*, which outlines Hashem's system of reward and punishment. In his address about the Land, Moshe Rabbeinu seems to be trying to hearten the people by describing its agricultural wealth and the comfortable lifestyle made possible there. Yet, the *Shema* section underscores that the abundance or lack of rain in the Land is directly controlled by Hashem, according to the level of faithful Torah observance by its inhabitants. Why are the passages praising the Land and highlighting Hashem's system of reward and punishment juxtaposed? More importantly, how does this textual emphasis on the Land speak to us in modern times? What are the implications for our lives?

Expectation and Precipitation

In order to understand the unique character of *Eretz Yisrael*, we need to compare and contrast this *parashah's* two passages regarding the Land. Upon closer examination, we notice that the first description praises the Land for its natural irrigation system and bountiful produce. The second passage, however, contrasts the irrigation of Egypt and that of Israel. Furthermore, the irrigation of the Land ("from the rain of heaven"), as described in the second passage, seems to be intertwined with Hashem's constant supervision of the Land: ארץ אשר ה' אלוקיך דורש אותה תמיד עיני ה' אלוקיך בה (a Land that Hashem your God constantly seeks out; the eyes of Hashem your God are on it).

It would seem that the introductory passage focuses on the **physical** attributes of the Land, while the latter passage emphasizes its **spiritual** characteristics. Both passages appear in the same *parashah* because the physical and spiritual qualities of *Eretz Yisrael* are not separate, but rather deeply intertwined and interdependent.

Jewish literature is replete with illustrations of the unique affinity that Hashem has toward the *Eretz Yisrael*. This affiliation parallels the relationship Hashem has with the Jewish nation. Our Sages stated as follows:

The Holy One, Blessed is He, told Moshe, ‘This Land is precious to me’ as it is written: ‘A Land that Hashem your God constantly seeks out³ and [the nation of] Israel is precious to me, as it is written: ‘because of Hashem’s love for you.’⁴ The Holy One, Blessed is He said, I will bring [the nation of] Israel, which is precious to me, to the Land which is precious to me.’⁵

Asks Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, was not the entire world and its inhabitants created by Hashem? Does He not control every aspect of the world He created? How does Hashem express and distinguish this special affection toward the Land of Israel? The verse itself provides the answers: ארץ אשר ה' אלוקיך דורש אותה תמיד. It is only this piece of the world that Hashem “seeks out.” The Land of Israel is orchestrated through pure, Divine supervision called *hashgachah peratis*. Hashem’s power filters down to other places through natural intermediaries, but Hashem’s influence in *Eretz Yisrael* is direct and undiluted. Its weather patterns and agricultural capacities function above the laws of nature.⁶

The unique atmosphere of the Land is especially highlighted by the text’s contrast between the irrigation systems of Egypt and Israel, as we will see. At first glance, the Torah is seemingly lauding the land of Egypt and criticizing Israel. *Eretz Yisrael* seems to be lacking natural irrigation, meaning that its inhabitants cannot expect a regular allotment of the earth’s water supply. The verses

³ *Devarim* 11:12.

⁴ *Devarim* 7:8.

⁵ *Bamidar Rabbah* 23:7.

⁶ *Sifsei Chaim Emunah V'Hashgachah*, p. 158.

emphasize Israel's dependence on rainfall, implying that it lacks its own natural body of water as a resource. Egypt, however, is portrayed as completely self-sufficient, not lacking water at all. One may irrigate his land at will "like a vegetable garden" since he can always draw upon the Nile River.⁷

Upon closer examination, however, the reader discovers that natural irrigation is anything but "natural". Egypt is watered on foot – והשקית ברגלך. Rabbi Friedlander notes that the foot is the lowest limb on the human body. Thus, the phrase והשקית ברגלך actually symbolizes the fact that Egyptian precipitation is provided through the lowest level of Divine intervention. Hashem predetermines Egypt's yearly water supply and is thereafter minimally involved in the country's agricultural needs.⁸

Israel, by contrast, is nourished by rainfall alone. However, the verse does not simply state that this occurs through "rain", but emphasizes למטר השמים תשתה מים; heaven-sent rains are Israel's water supply. The irrigation of the Land of Israel is a result of Hashem's direct concern with and constant supervision of Israel. ארץ אשר ה' אלוקיך דורש אותה תמיד עיני ה' אלוקיך בה (a Land that Hashem your God constantly seeks out; the eyes of Hashem your God are on it). Rabbi Friedlander explains that *Eretz Yisrael* enjoys the highest level of Divine intervention: water is provided directly from heaven. Israel does not have an annually predetermined water supply; rather, Hashem delivers rain according to the spiritual needs and merits of its residents.⁹

The distinction between Hashem's influence on Israel and His influence on other countries explains the immediate juxtaposition

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *ibid.*

of the *Shema* passage. Hashem uses Israel's rainfall as a medium through which He grants reward or inflicts punishment. Key phrases in this section of the *Shema* state as follows: "If you will listen to My commandments ... then I will provide rain for your Land in its proper time ... beware lest your heart be seduced and you turn astray ... then He will restrain the heaven so there will be no rain." Abundance or lack of rain in the Land is determined by its residents' fulfillment of God's Will. Therefore, as indicated by this section of *Shema*, the physical and spiritual climate of Israel is one and the same.

The environment in *Eretz Yisrael* thus promotes a more elevated level of existence than that of Egypt; the prescribed availability of water in Israel illustrates Hashem's desire for a relationship with the people of Israel. In fact, rainfall is dependent on human prayer. The *pasuk* that immediately precedes the creation of Adam HaRishon emphasizes this connection: **כִּי לֹא הִמְטִיר ה' אֱלֹהִים עַל הָאָרֶץ** (Because Hashem, God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to work the soil).¹⁰ Quoting the *gemara*, Rashi comments that Hashem had not sent rain **because** "there was no man."¹¹ No creature yet existed who could recognize the life-giving quality of rain! Adam HaRishon was the first to realize the need for rain and pray for it. Thus, Hashem has used rain as a medium through which to foster His relationship with human beings since their earliest days. So too, He has orchestrated the dependence of the land on heavenly assistance, so that the People of Israel remain constantly connected to Him.

Of course, Hashem provides sustenance for the whole world, but other entities **seem** or **feel** self-sufficient like Egypt. This

¹⁰ *Bereishis* 2:5.

¹¹ Rashi on *Bereishis* 2:5.

artificial independence is indicative of Hashem's more distant affiliation with them. Such is the case with the serpent who led Adam and Chava to sin in *parashas Bereishis*. Hashem punished the serpent that his food will be "the dust of the earth."¹² The curse is not scarcity of provisions, since dirt is abundant and readily available; rather, the real curse is lacking a sense of reliance on Hashem for sustenance.¹³ In essence, the ultimate punishment is distance from God.

Since the agricultural productivity of the Land is determined by the moral behavior of its residents, Hashem's presence is more acutely felt in the Land than anywhere else in the world. Certainly the entire world is filled with the reality of His Oneness, but Israel is a place with the clearest receptivity to the Divine. Holiness permeates the ground and the air, so that its environment is most conducive to receiving prophecy.¹⁴ Our Sages attest to the sanctity of *Eretz Yisrael* with many statements, such as the following: *Eretz Yisrael* is the most spiritual site in the world, existing on a more spiritually elevated plane than all other countries.¹⁵ Its environment is the most "tuned in" to Godliness.

Birth from Earth

Hashem has a unique affinity to the Land. *Eretz Yisrael* possesses an innate holiness, such that Hashem gave this Land top priority in the sequence of creation. Our Sages state: "The Land of Israel was created at the beginning and all the [rest of the] world

¹² *Bereishis* 3:14.

¹³ Rabbi Yitzchok Kirzner, *The Art of Jewish Prayer*, p. 7.

¹⁴ *Aderes Emunab*, p. 342.

¹⁵ *Zevachim* 54b.

was created at the end.”¹⁶ The Torah opens with an account of the formation of the universe: *בראשית ברא אלוקים* (in the beginning of God’s creation), a mystical process initiated by the forming of *Eretz Yisrael*. Moreover, the justification for introducing the Torah with the story of creation (as opposed to the first *mitzvah*) is for the purpose of illustrating the Jewish people’s eternal right to inherit the Land.¹⁷ Thus, two significant beginnings underscore the distinctiveness of Israel: the foundation of our world and the first words of the Torah.¹⁸

We are connected to the Land because it serves as an intermediary channel of our relationship as a nation to Hashem. However, we are also connected to *Eretz Yisrael* in a much deeper sense. Not only did the creation of the world begin with Israel, but so did the creation of humankind. Adam HaRishon was created from the *אדמה* (ground).¹⁹ In fact, Hashem used the same *אדמה* in creating Adam HaRishon that was used for creating the altar (the spiritual center of the Land): *מזבח אדמה תעשה לי* (make for me an altar of earth).²⁰ Therefore, all of humanity originates from the Land of Israel. Furthermore, Rabbi Moshe Wolfson underscores that humanity wasn’t only created **in the location of** Israel; it was fashioned **from the actual soil** of Israel.

All of this clearly illustrates the centrality of the Land of Israel from the beginning of time. The world was created from the Land of Israel and the rest of the world spread out from there. In addition, the beginning of humanity was created from the earth of

¹⁶ *Wellsprings of Faith*, pp. 27-30.

¹⁷ See Rashi’s comment on *Bereishit* 1:1.

¹⁸ *Wellsprings of Faith*, pp. 27-30.

¹⁹ See *Bereishit* 2:7 “And Hashem formed the man of soil from the earth” and 3:19 “By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, **until you return to the ground from which you were taken**”.

²⁰ *Shemos* 20:21, *Yerushalmi Nazir* 7:2.

the Land of Israel, resulting in a magnetic pull toward the Land. While this suggests a general human tendency toward Israel, our connection as Jews runs even deeper because of Hashem's unique relationship with the Jewish people. The first command given to the first Jew was the commandment to Avraham Avinu לך לך, go to the Land of Israel.²¹

Rabbi Wolfson explains that the Jewish people inherited “spiritual DNA” from the Land, and are thus innately connected to it. Our spiritual bond with the Land lasts during our lifetime and extends even after we die. Traditional Jewish burial draws a special custom from Adam HaRishon's formation from the soil: “For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”²² For this reason, there is a widespread custom to place soil of *Eretz Yisrael* inside a person's coffin, wherever he is buried.

The centrality of our connection to the Land is also evident from the following fascinating *midrash*: God told Moshe Rabbeinu, “The one who acknowledged his homeland was buried [in Israel] ... you who did not, will not be buried in your homeland.”²³ ‘The one’ to whom Hashem alludes is Yosef HaTzaddik. While Yosef HaTzaddik was imprisoned, he admits to his homeland by saying, “I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews.”²⁴ By contrast, Moshe Rabbeinu is not buried in Israel, because there is evidence of Moshe Rabbeinu denying his native soil. When Yisro's daughters reported that someone had protected them from the shepherds, their statement reveals a case of mistaken identity. “An Egyptian man saved us.”²⁵ Not only did Moshe Rabbeinu not

²¹ *Wellsprings of Faith*, pp. 27-30.

²² *Bereishis* 3:19.

²³ *Devarim Rabbah* 2.

²⁴ *Bereishis* 40:15.

²⁵ *Shemos* 2:19.

publicly correct their misperception, he actually reinforced it through his Egyptian dress and language.²⁶

Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin essentially confirms this criticism after posing the following questions: How can Moshe Rabbeinu be held accountable for his self-protective silence? How can he be blamed for not denying Egyptian nationality and for failing to proclaim himself an Israelite? After all, what were Moshe Rabbeinu's family roots in the Land? Neither he nor his parents were born there. Despite these seemingly legitimate rationalizations for Moshe Rabbeinu denying his Jewish essence, Rabbi Sorotzkin offers a powerful answer. From the moment Hashem promised Avraham Avinu the Land as an eternal inheritance to his descendants, Israel became the homeland of every Jew.

Even if a Jew is a citizen of another country, Israel should be identified as his homeland. Even if a Jew and his family have never even been there, he must always declare that his roots are in *Eretz Yisrael*. Neglecting to acknowledge one's connection to the Land is equivalent to denying one's spiritual birthplace. The Torah considers this behavior a sin against our homeland, for which punishment is prevention from being buried in Israel and thwarting the possibility of being returned to one's original source.²⁷

Every Jew in every part of the world is originally from the Land. This spiritual inheritance is yet another distinction between Israel and other countries of the world. This notion is illuminated by the following verses in *Tehillim*:

אזכיר רהב ובבל ליודעי, הנה פלשת וצור עם כוש, זה יולד שם. ולציון יאמר, איש ואיש יולד בה והוא יכוננה עליון.

²⁶ *Insights in the Torah*, p. 24.

²⁷ *ibid.*

I mention Rahav and Babylon to those who know, behold there are Philistia, and Tyre with Kush – this one was born there. But out of Zion it can be said: **Man and man were born in her** – and He, the most high, maintains her thus.²⁸

The *gemara* explains the cryptic double usage **איש ואיש**. In other countries, such as those listed in the verse, only a person born there is considered a citizen of that place. By contrast, there exists two types of people (**איש ואיש**) who are **יולד בה**, who call *Eretz Yisrael* their homeland. One type includes natives who were physically born there. The second type includes those individuals called citizens by virtue of their emotional and spiritual attachment to the Land.²⁹ Our bond with the Land is Divinely designed, as the above verse indicates (**והוא יכוננה עליין**) – Hashem makes it that way). Therefore, this connection is above time and space: it is eternal, irrespective of one's actual place of residence. Wherever a Jew is in the world, he is "from Israel" because the soul is connected to its native soil.

The following story is told about Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld. During the time after the Balfour Declaration, the British government enforced a quota of how many immigrants from each nation could come into *Eretz Yisrael* (then referred to as "Palestine"). A certain group of Romanian Jews wished to settle in *Eretz Yisrael*, but the British government's quota of Romanian immigrants had already been filled. In response, these Romanian Jews presented Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld with a *halachic* question, requesting permission to produce false identity papers. The quota of Czech immigrants was still incomplete, so these Jews wanted to masquerade as Czechoslovakian natives in order to enter Israel.

²⁸ *Tehillim* 87:4-5.

²⁹ Rav Aaron Soloveitchik, *Logic of the Heart Logic of the Mind*, quoting *Kesubos* 75a.

Rav Sonnenfeld denied *halachic* permission to exhibit this dishonest behavior.

The group then adjusted their appeal, asking if the false papers could indicate that they were already natives of **Palestine**. To this request, Rav Sonnenfeld surprisingly granted his whole-hearted support. He offered the following explanation: to say a Jew is “from Israel” is eternally true. Even non-natives of Israel were “born there.” The Jewish nation has an inseparable bond with the Land of Israel.

Affection and Connection Through the Land

Hashem’s special affinity for the Land, as expressed by His direct Divine influence, infuses the Land with a unique sanctity. The Jewish nation’s tie to the Land is both inherited from birth and developed during the lifetime of each individual. On the one hand, our bond to *Eretz Yisrael* is an innate spiritual inheritance. On the other hand, the Land (its climate and agricultural behavior) also functions as a physical medium through which Hashem responds to our moral conduct. Therefore, to nurture our relationship with Hashem, we must acknowledge and appreciate the essential value of the Land to our lives.

The Torah provides multiple illustrations of how the Land played a crucial role in Hashem’s relationship with His people. *Eretz Yisrael* was part of Hashem’s primary interaction with each of the Jewish patriarchs. As mentioned earlier, in Hashem’s initial revelation to Avraham Avinu, He instructed him לך לך – to go to the Land.³⁰ The first time Hashem appeared to Yitzchak Avinu is related in *parashas Toldos*. The Land was struck with a famine, and

³⁰ *Bereishis* 12:1.

Hashem instructed Yitzchak Avinu as follows: “Do not descend to Egypt. Dwell in the Land that I will tell you. Sojourn in this Land and I will be with you and bless you.”³¹ Likewise, Yaakov Avinu’s earliest prophecy included Hashem’s promise to give the Land to his descendents as an eternal inheritance.³² In this way, Hashem communicates and relates to the Jewish nation through the Land.

As we have discussed, *Eretz Yisrael* is the most conducive environment in which to connect to God, which is accomplished most effectively through performing *mitzvos* in the Land. Moreover, according to many, ideal *mitzvah* observance can **only** be achieved within *Eretz Yisrael*.³³ The Torah itself seems to confirm this notion: “This is the *mitzvah*, the rules and the laws that Hashem your God commanded (me) to teach you **so that you will keep them in the Land** you are crossing over to occupy.”³⁴ According to the Ramban, fulfillment of God’s Will (through *mitzvos*) is intrinsically related to the Land.³⁵ He quotes *sefer Melachim*, which describes how the king of Assyria commanded that the *Kobanim* return from exile to entice the Samaritans away from idolatry: הוליכו שמה אחד מהכהנים ... וילכו וישבו שם ויורם את משפט אלוקי הארץ (Bring there one of the priests ... and let them go and settle there and teach them the law of the God of the Land).³⁶ Hashem’s Law is thus embedded in the Land.

³¹ *Bereishis* 26:2-3.

³² *Bereishis* 28:13.

³³ See *Chasam Sofer* on *Vayeishev*.

³⁴ *Devarim* 6:1.

³⁵ See Ramban commentary on *Bereishis* 26:5, in which he clarifies the notion that the patriarchs observed the Torah before it was given on *Har Sinai*. Yaakov Avinu was perhaps able to marry two sisters because he was residing outside the Land.

³⁶ *Melachim II* 17:27.

One may wonder whether this is truly the case, as *mitzvah* observance is certainly mandatory even outside the Land. Rashi answers this question in a remarkable manner: He notes an unusual juxtaposition within the second paragraph of *Shema*, at the end of our *parashah*. Verse 17 includes vivid descriptions of punishment for *mitzvah* neglect (famine and exile), and verse 18 states: “You should place these words of mine upon your heart and upon your soul.” Rashi interprets this to mean that even after the Jewish nation goes into exile, they must still faithfully uphold the *mitzvos* so that they do not forget how to perform them. It would seem that *mitzvos* are certainly obligatory everywhere in the world, but their fulfillment is most significant within the holy atmosphere of the Land.³⁷

This may also be the rationale behind Moshe Rabbeinu’s desperate yearning to enter the Land, as described in the beginning of *parashas Va’eschanan*. Our Sages state: “Why did Moshe Rabbeinu yearn to enter *Eretz Yisrael*? Did he need to eat its fruits, or to satisfy himself from its bounty? Rather, Moshe Rabbeinu said: The people of Israel have been given many commandments, and they cannot be fulfilled except in the Land of Israel.”³⁸ The ‘many commandments’ may not have been referring only to those *mitzvos* incumbent on the Land (such as *shemittah* or tithing produce), but to all *mitzvos*. “Dwelling in *Eretz Yisrael* is the equivalent of all the *mitzvos* in the Torah.”³⁹ According to the *midrash*, residing in the Land is compared to accepting the sovereignty of Heaven.⁴⁰

³⁷ See Rashi and Ramban on 11:18.

³⁸ *Sotah* 14a.

³⁹ *Sifrei, Parashas Re’eh*.

⁴⁰ *Bereishis Rabbah* 40: “If your sons enter *Eretz Israel* they accept My kingdom, and if they don’t enter *Eretz Israel* then they don’t accept My Kingdom.”

Global Impact

Unquestionably, the unique spiritual status of *Eretz Yisrael* has a powerful influence on the Jewish people. However, it also impacts the rest of the world. This reality is evident from Rashi's comments on the verse above: ארץ אשר ה' אלוקיך דורש אותה תמיד. Rhetorically, Rashi asks: Does not Hashem seek out all lands? Hashem's attention to the Land, as indicated by this phrase, is connected to the words of the verse that directly precede it – למטר השמים תשתה מים – the heaven-sent rainfall. Surely, this notion cannot imply that rain in other countries does not come from Hashem. Rashi clarifies by citing the *midrash's* comment that Hashem's *derishah* (seeking out) of the Land is foremost, and that the *derishah* of other countries is only provided along with it.⁴¹ It follows therefore that the blessing and bounty given to the entire world actually hinge exclusively on what is granted to *Eretz Yisrael*.⁴²

Eretz Yisrael's preferential status amongst other lands coincides with our people's chosen status amongst the nations of the world. The *midrash* relates that Hashem said: "I created 70 peoples and I chose Israel. I created 7 days, and I chose Shabbos. I created 7 lands (continents) and I chose Israel."⁴³ The Slonimer Rebbe explains that these three choices parallel three different planes of existence: mankind (the Jewish people), time (Shabbos), and place (*Eretz Yisrael*). Each one has the preferential spiritual status of a clearer Godly connection. Therefore, all three function as intermediary channels for the rest of that plane of existence. We are

⁴¹ Rashi on *Devarim* 11:12, *Sifrei* 40.

⁴² *Sifrei* 15:14.

⁴³ *Midrash Shochar Tor*, as quoted by *Nesivos Shalom Bamidbar*, p. 76.

designated as “a light unto the nations”.⁴⁴ Similarly, just as Shabbos provides blessing for the rest of the week, *Eretz Yisrael* is the conduit for blessing for the rest of the world.⁴⁵

Anticipation for Emancipation

Thus far, we have analyzed the verses describing the Land and what they reveal about its spiritual beauty. We also know that *parashas Eikev* is always recited on the second Shabbos after Tisha B’Av. Why is the Land of Israel an appropriate theme to be mentioned after we commemorate the Temple’s destruction?

The destruction of the Temple and the exile from our Land both represent the same loss of a close relationship to Hashem. Historically, Tisha B’Av was a day of spiritual tragedy even before the Temple’s destruction. The infamous incident of the spies slandering the Land of Israel occurred on Tisha B’Av. Hashem had promised they would successfully conquer the Land, but the spies’ negative report about Israel filled the people with trepidation and they sat down to cry. Hashem punished them with 40 years of wandering the desert. Yet our Sages relate that there was an even more serious consequence for their actions: God responds: “Today you cried for nothing; in the future I’ll give you a **real** reason to cry [on this day].”⁴⁶

Our return to the Land of Israel is an intrinsic element of our redemption. However, physically returning to Israel is part of a deeper, spiritual homecoming. Within the very same chapter from which the *haftarah* of *Eikev* is taken, we find the following verse:

⁴⁴ *Yeshayahu* 49:6.

⁴⁵ *Nesivos Shalom Bamidbar*, p. 76.

⁴⁶ *Ta’anis* 29a.

“[Hashem] said, ‘it is insufficient that [the prophet] be a servant for Me [only] to raise up the tribes of Yaakov Avinu and **to restore the ruins of Israel; I will make you a light unto the nations**, so that My salvation may extend to the ends of the earth.’”⁴⁷ Thus, coming home to Israel includes the Jewish nation resuming the responsibilities of her privileged status. Both the chosen people and the chosen Land are aligned to be Hashem’s emissaries for the blessings He wishes to bestow on the rest of the world.

In light of these sources, it behooves us to ask the following question: how genuinely cognizant are we of this Messianic vision? Belief in the redemption is a central component of Judaism, and we must assure it is a primary factor in our mindset. However, even this belief may not be enough. Our Sages note that we will be asked several questions when we are judged after death, one of which is as follows: **צפיה לישועה** (did you await the redemption)?⁴⁸ It is easy to believe in the redemption **intellectually**, but for what behavior does the *gemara* imply we are held **spiritually** accountable?

We often get distracted by the endless details of our personal lives, causing us to neglect our responsibility to retain a concrete Messianic belief. As Torah Jews, our time and priorities are frequently monopolized by a personal growth-oriented mindset, which itself is certainly a positive ideal. However, this tendency also causes us to operate primarily in a narrow and self-centered world. The question of **צפיה לישועה** challenges us to assess whether we neglected to focus on the broader cosmic vision in our lifetimes. Do we actually see ourselves as part of the larger picture of redemption? Are we making a genuine effort to move the history of the Jewish nation forward, toward our promised future in the Land?

⁴⁷ *Yeshayahu* 49:6.

⁴⁸ *Shabbos* 31a.

Consider the exact wording of how we are tested: **צפית לישועה** and not **קוית לישועה** (did you **hope** for the redemption). What is the distinction between **תקוה** (hoping) and **צפיה** (awaiting)? Rabbi Uzi Kalheim clarifies that **תקוה** is an emotion of longing in the heart. **צפיה** implies emotion that motivates action: expectation and anticipation.⁴⁹ Thus the challenge of **ציפת לישועה** is not asking whether or not we wanted redemption, but whether that emotion inspired us to take action. Do we seize every opportunity to hasten the redemption? If we eagerly anticipate Hashem fulfilling His messianic promise, then it will permeate our thoughts and every daily endeavor will be aimed toward achieving that goal.

Our desire for redemption should shape our behavior. This sentiment is expressed, for example, in the fact that our Sages state that a diaspora Jew should pray toward Israel, and a Jew in Israel should pray toward Jerusalem.⁵⁰ In light of this obligation, it is not uncommon in a Jewish home to find a decorative sign indicating in which direction to face during prayer. [In the Western Hemisphere, that sign would read “*mizracl*” (east). In fact, some *siddurim* have a compass embedded into the cover.] On this concept of facing Israel during prayer, Rabbi Yaakov Emden emphasizes that simply directing one’s body is not sufficient to make a profound emotional impression.⁵¹ So often, we go through the motions without understanding what spiritual purpose such behavior is meant to achieve. Many times, when Jews from the diaspora visit someone in Israel and they need to *daven*, they mistakenly ask, “Which way is east?” When in Israel, one is so close to the spiritual source of Jerusalem that it might not necessarily be toward the east! Not only our bodies, but also our hearts,

⁴⁹ *Aderes Emunah*, p. 341-342.

⁵⁰ *Berachos* 30b.

⁵¹ *Siddur Beis Yaakov*, p. 26.

should be turned toward Jerusalem. When we face Israel to pray, we should think about actualizing our intentions to return to the spiritual source.

We are obligated to keep *Eretz Yisrael* as part of our vision for both our personal future and our national future. If one is compelled to live in the diaspora, he should constantly bear in mind that it is a temporary residence. The Jews belong in their Land and exile is merely a transitory reality.⁵² Forgetting the Land is akin to disregarding a crucial element of our relationship with Hashem.

According to Rabbi Yissochar Teichtal, *hy”d*, it is precisely our weak emotional memory of the promised Land that keeps us in exile.⁵³ He quotes the following *midrash*: “The people of Israel were exiled only because they despised *Eretz Yisrael*, as it is written, ‘and they despised the desirable Land’⁵⁴.”⁵⁵ Interestingly, another mid-rashic source states: “The Children of Israel were exiled because they despised three things: the kingdom of Heaven, the kingdom of David, and the Holy Temple ... it says, ‘afterwards the Children of Israel will return and seek out the Lord’⁵⁶.”⁵⁷ Rabbi Teichtal explains that these sources are congruent, since the above three elements (kingdom of Heaven, kingdom of David, and the Temple) are part and parcel of what is included in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Rabbi Teichtal further notes that our Sages mandated thrice-daily prayers for the rebuilding of the Temple. Are these prayers not enough to fulfill the requirement of ‘seeking out the Lord?’

⁵² *Maharal, Netzach Yisrael*, chapter 1.

⁵³ *Eim HaBanim Semeicha*, pp. 156-157.

⁵⁴ *Tebillim* 106:24.

⁵⁵ *Yalkut Shimoni*, as quoted in *Eim HaBanim Semeicha*, pp. 156-157.

⁵⁶ *Hoshea* 3:5.

⁵⁷ *Yalkut Shimoni*, vol. 2, *remez* 106.

Rabbi Teichtal answers this question by presenting the following passage:

What should a person do to become wise? He should intensify his studies ... [The retort was], ‘Many have done so but have not succeeded.’ Rather, he should [also] beg for compassion from He who possesses wisdom ... What does this teach us? One without the other is insufficient.”⁵⁸

We must be cognizant of the fact that action and prayer are equally necessary components to achieving our spiritual goals. Therefore, our prayers for the redemption and return to the Land are not enough, because prayers without personal effort accomplish nothing.

This notion of proactive *tefillah* is hinted to in the following verse: “One thing I have asked (שאלתי) from the Lord, that thing I shall request (אבקש): that I may dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of my life.”⁵⁹ What is implied by the two similar verbs שאל and בקש? “One thing I have asked (שאלתי)” means to pray for something, to hope in one’s heart, while “That thing I shall request (אבקש)” means taking concrete action to seek out and search for what one desires. When we pray with our mouths, we pay lip service to the value of redemption to our Land by facing Yerushalayim. But do we arouse our hearts and truly yearn to return to the Land in which we can feel the closest connection to Hashem? Do we emotionally or financially support those who are living or learning Torah in Israel? Do those of us who already merit to live in Israel sincerely long for the ingathering of all our exiled family?

The message of *parashas Eikev* is to remember our connection to Hashem through the Land. Our three weeks of mourning the

⁵⁸ *Eim HaBanim Semeicha*, pp. 158-160.

⁵⁹ *Tehillim* 27:4.

destruction of the Temple translates into fervent hopes and prayers. Our mission after Tisha B'Av is to take those emotions and transform them into action; we should actively seek out ways to strengthen our connection to Hashem through the Land that He promised us.