

Parashat Behar-Bechuchotai 5781, 2021:

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*The Glory of Eretz Yisrael*

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The second verse of Parashat Behar contains the well-known words, “When you come to the Land that I [Hashem] am giving you,” that serve as a prologue to the *mitzvah* of *smittah* (the Sabbatical year). Many *brachot* found in Parashat Bechuchotai also have a pronounced *Eretz Yisrael*-centered focus:

If you follow My statutes and observe My commandments and perform them, I will give your rains in their time, the Land will yield its produce, and the tree of the field will give forth its fruit. Your threshing will last until the vintage, and the vintage will last until the sowing; you will eat your food to satiety, and you will live in security in your land. And I will grant peace in the Land, and you will lie down with no one to frighten [you]; I will remove wild beasts from the Land, and no army will pass through your land. (*Sefer Vayikra* 26:4-6, all Tanach translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

These *pasukim*, like so many others throughout Tanach, teach us that *Eretz Yisrael* is the place of and for, the Jewish people. Yet, while almost seven million Jews live in Israel today, the remainder of the world’s nearly 15 million Jews live outside of Israel. It seems that although many of us are familiar with Rabbi Yehudah Halevi’s (1075-1141) famous words, “*Libi b’ mizrach v’ anochi b’ sof ma’ a’ rav*” (“My heart is in the East, and I am in the uttermost West”), we have not yet heeded their message.

What is necessary for *kibbutz galyuot* (ingathering of the exiles) and permanent resettlement in our land? Perhaps Rabbi Yehudah Halevi said it best in his classic work,

*HaKuzari*:

When people become aroused to love this holy place and to press for the anticipated event this, too, generates great reward. Therefore, it says, “You shall arise and have mercy upon Zion, for it is time to be gracious to it, for the appointed time has arrived. For your servants have desired its stones, and they favor its dust.” (*Sefer Tehillim* 102:14-15) This means that Jerusalem will be rebuilt when the Jewish people yearn for it to the ultimate degree. (Chapter 5:28, translation, Rabbi Daniel Korobkin)

These words are congruent with the celebrated statement in *Midrash Bereishit Rabbah*: “It is better to live in the deserts of *Eretz Yisrael* than to live in palaces in the diaspora (Parashat Lech Lecha, 39:8) Based upon these sources, it appears that *kibbutz galyuot* will take place when the Jewish people sincerely yearn for the very dust and stones of *Eretz Yisrael*, for then, our love for the land will be truly manifest.

One of the essential sources wherein *Chazal* present the Land’s central theological significance is *Tosefta Avodah Zarah* 4:5:

*Dovid HaMelech* suggested a homiletic interpretation and said: “Anyone who abandons the Land at a time of peace, and travels to the diaspora is as if he is worshipping idols, as the text states: ‘And I will rejoice over them to do good to them, and I will plant them in this land truly with all My heart and with all My soul.’ (*Sefer Yirmiyahu* 32:41). [That is,] during the entire time they are upon it [the Land,] it is as if they are planted thereupon before Me in truth, with all My heart and with My entire soul, but, if they are not [living] on it, it is as if they are not planted thereupon before Me in truth, with all My heart and with My entire soul.” (Translation my own)

A stirring analysis of this passage was authored by Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal *zatzal* (1885-1945), in his celebrated work on Religious Zionism entitled, “*Eim HaBanim Semeicha*.”

“...but, if they are not [living] on it, it is as if they are not planted thereupon before Me in truth, with all My heart and with My entire soul.” This is an amazing statement, for the Holy One blessed be He is saying to us that when the Jewish people are not in *Eretz Yisrael*,

they are not cleaving to His heart and soul. As such, what is being done to us at this time [1943], and the diminished level of *hashgacha* (Divine Providence) that is upon us, should not be surprising in our eyes, precisely since we are not cleaving to Him within His entire heart and soul, as we are in the land of the nations of the world [that is *galut*]. (From the Second Introduction, this and the following translations my own).

For Rav Teichtal, who was murdered on a transport train by the Nazis (*yemach sheman v'zichram*) during the closing days of WWII, the unspeakable horrors of the *Shoah* and the palpable lack of Hashem's *hashgacha* at that time were direct results of our living in *galut*, rather than in *Eretz Yisrael*. These are dour words, indeed, that seem to leave little room for anyone to live in the diaspora. Nonetheless, his following words offer a ray of hope for those of us who have not yet made the commitment to begin the *aliyah* process:

But as soon as we try to return to it [the Land], then we will immediately be cleaving to Him within His entire heart and soul...that is to say that one whose eyes and heart yearn to go up to *Eretz Yisrael* is considered as if he is already in *Eretz Yisrael*. As such, it is clear that if we focus our thoughts on the idea of returning to our holy land, then we will immediately be cleaving to Him within His entire heart and soul, and His *hashgacha* will rest upon us with the totality of His soul, may He be blessed, so that He [once again] will protect us with an open eye that will never close. [Moreover,] He will never cease to save us from our enemies, and He will enable us to be successful in everything that we will do, for then, we will go up to *Tzion* in joy, and the Jewish people will go out with an upraised hand from their physical and spiritual exile...that will reach completion with the fulfillment of the Torah and the *mitzvot*...

May the time come soon, and in our days, when our entire people will be dedicated to implementing *kibbutz galyuot*, when we will leave our physical and spiritual exile behind, return to *Eretz Yisrael* in joy, and fulfill the Torah and *mitzvot* in their entirety. With Hashem's help and our heartfelt desire, may this be so. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom, and may Hashem in His infinite mercy remove the pandemic from *klal Yisrael* and all the nations of the world.

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha*'s name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdb718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:  
<http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.