

On the Love for Zion

Rabbi Azarya Berzon

Co-Rosh Beit Midrash, Zichron Dov Yeshiva University

Torah Mitzion Beit Midrash of Toronto

R' Chiya son of Gamda would roll in the dust [of the land of Israel] as it says (Tehillim 102) 'Your servants desire the stones of the Land, and cherish its dust'

K'tubot 112b

ר' חייא בר גמדה מיגדר בעפרה, שנאמר
(תהלים ק"ב) כי רצו עבדיך את אבניה
ואת עפרה יחוננו.
כתובות קיב:

The Gemarah at the end of K'tubot describes the love of Rav Chiya for the Land of Israel. When he arrived at its shores, he alighted from his camel and wallowed in the dust of the Land, as the verse says in T'hilim, "Your servants desire the stones of the Land, and cherish its dust". In this declaration, *Dovid HaMelech* proclaims a two-fold love for the Land of Israel. The "dust" represents Eretz Yisrael as a means to an end; we can plant in the soil of the Land and produce grains and fruits with which we fulfill the special agricultural mitzvot that can only be observed in Eretz Yisrael. HaRav A. Y. HaCohen Kook zt"l taught that *Dovid HaMelech* added "stones" to demonstrate that our love for the Land is an end unto itself; after all, what can you plant in a stone?

Those who come to live in the Land are motivated by this powerful love for Eretz Yisrael. On a purely *halachic* level, most religious Jews who are established in *Chutz LaAretz* rely on one of a variety of legal reasons for which they are exempt from the obligation to settle in the Land. But the mitzvah of living in the Land, like the mitzvah of contributing for the building of the *Mishkan* in the desert, depends upon *nedivut ha'lev*, the prompting of one's heart. The Almighty *Shechina* invites man into His home, declaring, "if you desire a close relationship with me, build me a home. If you lack that desire, you and I can have a long distance relationship."

Eretz Yisrael is the abode of *HaShem*. If one craves an intimate relationship with the *Shechina*, he will settle in the Land. If however, one is satisfied with a long distance relationship with the Almighty, he will rely on whatever technical exemption he can and remain in *Chutz LaAretz*.

My rebbe, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, eulogized his uncle, the Brisker Rav, z"l, and spoke of the latter's love for Zion. "Love for Zion expresses itself in the desire to live in the Land, strike roots therein, love its soil and desire its stones. Whilst my Uncle separated himself from the secular Zionist ideology, he was a genuine lover of Zion. He lived in the Holy City [of Yerushalayim] and was totally committed to its destiny. He shared in the burden of a community under siege, and refused to seek refuge and emigrate to safe cities outside the Land of Israel."

Those who are privileged to dwell in Israel today face the great challenges of strengthening the security of the state, as well as building up its financial and social institutions. But perhaps the greatest challenge of all is in the arena of Torah and mitzvot. Generations of Jews from the four

redemption emerge everywhere, for those who will only open their eyes. The people are curious about, nay, thirst for Judaism, its wisdom and its values. We must ask ourselves, “are we there to fill the void? Are we teaching by word and by deed?” The glorious opportunity has been awarded, by Divine Providence, to our generation, to bring about the consolation our people have for two thousand years longed for, the *nechama* expressed by Zecharya HaNavi, and reinforced by Rebbe Akiva.

They sinned through the elders, as it says “and there stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel ... every man with his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up.” And they were punished through the elders, as it says “They sit upon the ground, and keep silence, the elders of the daughter of Zion;” and they were consoled through the elders as it is written “Once again old men and women will sit in the streets of Jerusalem”

Pesikta Rabti 33

R’ Akiva said to the sages “now that the prophesy of Uriyah [of Zion being plowed under] has been fulfilled, it is obvious that the prophesy of Zecharia will be fulfilled.” In this fashion the sages said to him “Akiva, you have comforted us, Akiva, you have comforted us”

Makkot 24b

חטאו בזקנים שנאמר (יהזקאל ה' י"א) ושבעים מזקני ישראל וכו' עומדים לפניהם ואיש מקטרתו בידו ועתר ענן הקטרת עלה; ולקו בזקנים שנאמר ישבו לארץ ידמו זקני בת ציון (איכה ב' י'); ומתנחמים בזקנים דכתיב עוד ישבו זקנים וזקנות ברחבות ירושלים (זכריה ח' ד'). פסיקתא רבתי [פיסקא לג]:

אמר להן ר"ע לחכמים עכשיו שנתקיימה נבואתו של אוריה [ציון שדה תחרש], בידוע שנבואתו של זכריה מתקיימת. בלשון הזה אמרו לו עקיבא ניהמתנו עקיבא ניהמתנו. מכות כד: