

Collected Insights on Israel from Members of the YU Torah MiTzion Community Kollelim

אין מזל לישראל

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חז"ל במסכת שבת, דף קנו:; מספרים לנו אודות מקרה מעניין שאירע ביום חתונת ביתו של רבי עקיבא. ומעשה שהיה כך היה: באותו היום, עת הכלה המהוללה התכוננה לאירוע המרגש, הסירה את סיכתה מעל לראשה ותחבה בחור שבקיר – על מנת שישתמר שם. למחרת היום, ניגשה לקחת את הסיכה בחזרה ולתדהמתה מצאה נחש שנמשך יחד עם סיכתה, והתגלה הדבר כי בעת נעיצת הסיכה בקיר נדקר הנחש בעינו. שאלה אביה, רבי עקיבא, "מאי עבדת?", קרי, בזכות איזה מעשה ניצלת מהכשתו של הנחש? ענתה לו ביתו – אשתקד, בעיצומה של מסיבת החתונה, בא עני ודפק על הדלת וכנראה כולם היו טרודים בסעודה ולא היה מי שישמע אותו, וניגשתי אני, אמרה הכלה, והגשתי לו את מנתי.

עד כאן סיפור יפה ונחמד, לולא העובדה המרתקת והקצת מטרידה אותה השמטתי, ויש לתת עליה את הדעת. בתחילת הסיפור התלמוד מציין שיום אחד, ניגשו ה'חוזים בכוכבים' לרבי עקיבא וציינו בפניו – שיידע, כי ביום חופתה של ביתו יכיש אותה נחש ותמות!

יש מספר תהיות שניתן להעלות בהקשר זה. ראשית, מה פשר הדבר שביתו של רבי עקיבא אמורה למות ביום נישואיה דווקא? ה'חוזים בכוכבים' לא מנבאים ותולים את מותה בתאריך מסוים אלא באירוע. אירוע החתונה. ולפני זה יש לשאול, מדוע בכלל נגזר עליה למות? הרי ברמת העיקרון ה'חוזים' צדקו. הנחש היה כפסע מלהמיתה, אלא שנעיצת הסיכה חסמה וקטלה את הנחש. ועל כך יש לתמוה מדוע? מדוע נגזר עליה כך מלכתחילה? ותמיהה אחרונה שבוודאי מטרידה היא, אם אכן ידע רבי עקיבא שביתו עתידה למות ביום חתונתה, איך שמר אביה את הדבר? איך איפשר לה אביה להיכנס כך לחופה, בשוויון נפש, ולא מנעה מלהינשא??

נדון בדברים. רבי עקיבא מתבשר שביתו עתידה למות אם תחתן. אך אין זו גזירה שלא ניתן לשנותה. רבי עקיבא שם אל ליבו כי המוות תלוי לא בתאריך מסוים אלא בפעולת הכניסה לחופה, במעשה. מעשה של ביתו יקבעו אם אכן תמות או לא. יש כאן התמודדות בין גורל שמונחת מלמעלה לבין כוחו ואחריותו של האדם

¹ חלקים ניכרים מן המאמר מבוססים על שיחה מאת מו"ר הרב אליהו בלומנצוויג, ראש ישיבת ההסדר בירוחם, ישראל.

לשנות את גורלו ע"י מעשיו. התמודדות בין מה ש'צריך' לקרות, בין ה'מוכתב', לבין האמירה שבאפשרותנו לשנות ולמחוק כיתוב זה. ביום חתונת האדם ישנו סיכון אדיר. דווקא יום זה המסמל את תחילתו של בניית בניין חדש בישראל טומן בחובו חשש גדול. בוודאי שקל ופשוט יותר לחיות בהוויה הקודמת, המוכרת. קפיצת מדרגה עלולה להוביל להתרסקות, לנפילה. באופן פרדוקסאלי, דווקא הרחבת החיים והמעבר לקומה גבוהה עלולים להוביל לאיבוד היציבות ולמוטט את כל מה שנבנה עד כה. ההתחדשות מזמינה התמודדות. התמודדות שסופה עלולה להתגלות ככישלון. הקפיצה למים יכולה לגרום חלילה לטביעה.

על ביתו של ר' עקיבא נגזר למות ביום חתונתה כי אירוע זה, של בניית קומה אדירה, מטבעו הינו גם סיכון אדיר שעלול להוביל להתרסקות, למוות. ה'חוזים בכוכבים' מסמלים את הטבע, את מה שסביר על פי הנורמה, את ההסתברות, את מה ש'אמור' להתרחש עת מסתכנים ומנסים לבנות בניין. במעשה החתונה (ללא קשר לתאריך או יום מסוים) יש חשש וסיכון טבעי לחידולן ולנפילה.

רבי עקיבא הבין שאין להישאר סטטיים. אין להיכנע לכוחות הטבע, לנורמה. ישראל לא כפופים למזלות ולגרמי השמיים. בידני הכוח לנתן את 'גזר הדין'. בדומה לנאמר במשנה במסכת עדויות (פרק ה' משנה ז') – "מעשיך יקרבוך ומעשיך ירחקוך." מעשי האדם יכולים לשנות את גורלו. אין כאן המקום להיכנס לסוגיה איו רמת סיכון הינה ריאליית ביחסי ביטחון והשתדלות. וודאי שאת זאת גם יש לקחת בחשבון, אך דבר אחד ברור – אין כניעה למהלך מוכתב. יש מציאות, ובידינו ליצור אותה, היכולה לפרוץ את המציאות הטבעית.

החלטת הכרזת העצמאות היא הרי החלטה מטורפת ובלתי הגיונית בעליל. היא בוודאי מזמינה את חיסולו של הקיום הקודם. ערעור וסיכון הסטאטוס קוו שהתרגלו לחיות בתוכו. ויתרה מזו, גם עלולה להוביל לתוצאות הרוט אסון. וכידוע, מיד אחרי ההכרזה על תקומת המדינה פלשו צבאות ערב השכנים לארץ ישראל על מנת לנסות ולמוטט את היוזמה ה'הזויה' של הקמת מדינה ליהודים ובעצם לכלותינו. השאלה למה רבי עקיבא מתיר לביתו להינשא חופפת לשאלה מדוע דוד בן גוריון מסתכן ומכריז על המדינה.

רבי עקיבא בהכירו את ביתו האמין בכוחותיה, ביכולותיה לפרוץ את המציאות המוכתבת. הוא האמין במעשיה. ועל כן לא חשש להתרסקות עת יצאה החוצה לבנות את בניינה. רק שאלה – 'מאי עבדת?' מה עשית? בוודאי היה מעשה שבזכותו הצלחת לדלג מעל המכשול ולהצליח לבנות את בניינך. מה היה אותו מעשה שעל ידו ובזכותו הצלחת לגבור על כוחות הטבע?!

ביתו של רבי עקיבא היא היחידה ששמה לב לעני הרעב. כולם טרודים בשמחת החתונה אך דווקא 'כוכב האירוע' היא זו ששמה את ליבה אל הדלפון העומד בפתח. תשומת ליבה לסיטואציה הזו – בשעה שהייתה בוודאי עסוקה, מעידה עליה כמה הבינה והפנימה את גודל אחריותה, את תפקידה לשנות את פני המציאות – להשביע את העני הרעב ולשנות את מזלו ואת גורלו. לגבור על הטבע שהוא נתון בתוכו – כאדם רעב, מסכן ושפל ולבנות בו קומה של שובע – רוממות. היא הבינה שבידה הדבר – באפשרותה לשנות. לכן זכתה שביום חתונתה ניצלה מהמוות, מהחידולן. וזאת, מפני שקמה ועשתה מעשה. הראתה שאינה מכפיפה עצמה לחוקי הטבע אלא מאמינה בכוחה לשנות את מציאותו של העני ולכן אף היא לא הייתה כפופה לטבע ולמזלות וניצלה ממיתה.

עלינו להודות לקב"ה שנתן בלב מנהיגינו את העוז לעשות את המעשה – להכריז על תקומת מדינתנו. כעת, בידינו האחריות להמשיך בכוחות העשייה. עלינו לזכור ש'אין מזל לישראל'. אילו הייתה התנהלות טבעית לישראל לא היינו יכולים להגיע למעמד הזה של יכולת להכריז על עצמאותנו. על פי ה'טבע' וה'היגיון', שבכל דור ודור עומדים עלינו לכלותינו, ובייחוד עת היינו נפוצים בארבע כנפות הארץ, לא היינו אמורים להיות אלא שריד ארכיאולוגי נושן. כעת משמנהיגנו קפצו למים, העיזו, עלינו להמשיך לשחות בכל הכוח ונגד כל הגלים המאיימים להטביענו, נגד כל הנחשים המאיימים להכישנו, להמשיך ולעשות, להמשיך ולבנות את הבניין המופלא הזה שקוראים לו מדינת ישראל כמגדלור לשאר הארצות והעמים. ועניין זה יצלח כל עוד בלבב פנימה תשכון התקווה, האמונה. כל עוד נאמין כי מעשינו הם אלה שיקרבונו או חלילה ירחקונו. כל עוד נפנים כי בידינו הדבר וש'אין מזל לישראל'!

The Significance of Eretz Yisrael: Halachic Implications

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There are many halachic issues that are closely associated with the land of Israel. The Rishonim debate the extent of one's obligation to live in Eretz Yisrael,² and there are a multitude of *mitzvot hateluyot ba'aretz*, mitzvot that apply only to those who live in the land of Israel, such as *terumah*, *ma'aser* and *shemittah*. However, it is interesting to note that the significance of Eretz Yisrael, both regarding the value of dwelling there as well as its elevated degree of *kedusha*, has halachic implications in seemingly unrelated areas.

The Gemara, *Menachot* 44a, writes that one who rents a house in the Diaspora is not obligated to affix a mezuzah upon his doorpost during the first 30 days of his residence. However, if one rents a home in Eretz Yisrael, the obligation begins immediately.³ The Gemara continues to explain that the reason for this distinction is due to *yishuv Eretz Yisrael*, the value of settling the land of Israel. Rashi explains this distinction in the following manner: The halacha⁴ states that if a Jew will be taking over the residence of another Jew, the first renter is not permitted to remove his mezuzot when he leaves. Rather, he must leave them for the incoming tenant. Therefore, requiring the renter to put up the mezuzot immediately creates a deterrent for him to vacate his residence, since he will have to acquire other mezuzot for his new home. The rabbis of the Talmud considered the importance of living in Eretz Yisrael, and shaped the halacha regarding mezuzah in a manner that would encourage people to do so.

A further manifestation of this notion is found in the Gemara, *Gittin* 8b. The Gemara concludes that if one is purchasing land in Israel from a non-Jew, he may commission a non-Jew to write the bill of sale even on Shabbat. Despite the fact that generally one is not permitted to request a non-Jew to perform what would be considered a Torah prohibition for a Jew to perform, even in a situation when attempting to fulfill a mitzvah, due to the vital nature of the mitzvah of acquiring land in Israel, an exception is made and one may ask a non-Jew to perform an activity that is considered a Torah prohibition (writing on Shabbat).⁵

In addition to encouraging the settling of Eretz Yisrael, there are halachot that reflect its unique status as well. In *Makkot* 7a, the Gemara discusses a case where a person is sentenced in one court, flees before the sentence is carried out, and is subsequently brought before a different court. An apparent contradiction is raised as to whether the second court should simply implement the initial decision or re-try the case. The resolution reached by the Gemara is that if the defendant fled from Eretz Yisrael to the Diaspora, the original verdict is automatically implemented. But if he fled from the Diaspora to Eretz Yisrael, the case is re-tried. The reason given is that the *zechut*, merit, of Eretz Yisrael creates a possibility that a new angle will be

² See Ramban, *Shich'chat Haesin* no. 4.

³ This is codified in *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De'ah* 286:22.

⁴ See *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De'ah* 291:2.

⁵ Tosafot, s.v. *Af Al Gav*, quote the Bahag who seems to apply this to the mitzvah of *brit milah* as well.

discovered that could lead to the innocence of the defendant. The elevated level of *kedusha* in Eretz Yisrael can even cause a trial to have a different result.

The Gemara, *Megillah* 28b, reflects an additional application of this idea. In a discussion regarding the appropriate usage of a *beit haknesset*, synagogue, the Gemara suggests that בתי כנסיות שבבבל על תנאי הן עשויין, the synagogues in Bavel were built with a stipulation, and therefore certain activities, such as eating and drinking, that would generally be prohibited in a synagogue, are permitted in the synagogues of Bavel. Tosafot, s.v. *Batei Knesiyot*, explain that this stipulation only works in Bavel (and other lands in the Diaspora) because at the time of the Redemption, the *kedusha* of those synagogues will dissipate. However, in Eretz Yisrael, where the synagogues will maintain their sanctity, such a stipulation would not be effective.⁶ Eretz Yisrael's status as the ultimate destination of the Jewish people affects the halacha even before that time arrives.

The significance of Eretz Yisrael can be traced throughout Tanach as well as throughout the thoughts and writings of great Jewish leaders over the course of history. The fact that Chazal went as far as to incorporate its value into shaping halacha as well, is a clear indication of the central role it plays in the mindset of the Jewish people.

Does Israel Need Foreign Aid?

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Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's visit to Israel in January 2014 attracted the attention of Jews worldwide. As the Prime Minister addressed the Knesset, vowing unwavering support of the Jewish nation because "it is right to do so," many Jews from other countries looked on, longing for the day when their leader would be as supportive.

The trip was successful; it strengthened the relationship between political allies and furthered the economic relationship between the two countries through trade agreements. Foreign support, from Canada and other nations, especially in such an overt way, is often viewed as critical to the survival of our small state. In fact, most of AIPAC's work is focused on this exact goal. And an important one it is. Without the foreign military and economic support provided to Israel, how is a country of eight million, surrounded by over 100 million Arabs, many of them hostile toward the Jewish state, to survive?

While this attitude seems completely logical, a cursory look at Tanakh may prove otherwise. In the military realm, the poet (Tehillim 20:8) says, "Some [nations] with chariots, and some [nations] with horses; but we, in the name of Hashem, our G-d, call out." Rabbi David Kimkhi explains that the poet is informing us that while our enemies come upon us with chariots and horses, and believe that their military might will ensure their victory, we will call out in the name of G-d, and we will be victorious, despite our lack of physical weapons.

⁶ See *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 151:11 and the comment of *Mishna Berurah* 151:37.

Moving from Tehillim to Sefer Bamidbar, we find a prophecy stating that the Jewish people are destined to dwell alone. After being hired by King Balak to curse the Jewish nation, Bilam predicts that the Jewish people “shall dwell alone, and will not be reckoned among the nations” (Bamidbar 23:9). Onkelos explains that the trait of living in solitude was inherited from our forefathers, yet despite this isolation, Am Yisrael will not be annihilated.

King Balak accuses Bilam of failing, in that he blessed the Jewish people when he was commissioned to curse them (Bamidbar 24:10), and from this we may infer that dwelling alone is a positive. Yet our sages aren’t as convinced that it is a blessing to dwell in isolation. Rabbi Abba bar Kahana (*Sanhedrin* 105b) said, “All of [Bilam’s blessings] were eventually transformed into the curse [he had intended] except for [the curse regarding] shuls and *batei midrashot*.” The idea that dwelling alone is truly a curse is not hard to accept. The Torah introduces the concept of loneliness in a negative context, “It is not good for man to be alone” (Bereishit 2:18). Other references to solitude in Tanakh are made in regards to a leper (VaYikra 13:46) and Jerusalem in a state of destruction (Eikha 1:1), not placing this attribute in the greatest light. Perhaps this is why the commentators do not read Bilam’s statement as one that prophesizes detachment, functioning without partners or allies. For example, Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra suggests that the prophecy speaks of the Jews avoiding assimilation, while Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno posits that dwelling in solitude refers to a solely Jewish presence in the Land of Israel. The commentators specifically avoid saying that Bilam’s blessing meant living without the need for allies.⁷

Having allies can be extremely beneficial, as Shlomo HaMelekh learned. Inheriting an empire that was strong and stable, Shlomo HaMelekh’s main goal was to build the Temple his father did not merit to build. He also expanded foreign relations, building strong ties with many leaders of other nations. While the direct benefits can be seen in trade agreements that were made—which enabled Shlomo HaMelekh to access much-needed supplies such as wood and gold—these relationships were clearly not only pragmatic. Melakhim I, Chapter 9:10-14, describes but one of the relationships with a foreign leader that Shlomo maintained well after the Temple’s construction was complete. Investing in these relationships with foreign diplomats and creating new ones enabled Shlomo HaMelekh to expand his empire, enhancing both its physical, as well as its intellectual, property.

But for what? What was his end goal? If the Jewish people were safe and secure, why did Shlomo HaMelekh continue to grow and solidify these foreign relationships? An answer can be found in the previous chapter:

If the foreigner who is not of Your people Israel, comes from a distant land for the sake of Your Name—For they shall hear about Your Great Name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm—when he comes to pray towards this House, listen in Your heavenly abode, and grant all that the foreigner asks You for. Thus, the peoples of the earth will know Your Name and revere You as does Your people

וְגַם אֶל־הַנִּכְרִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־מֵעַמְּךָ יִשְׁרָאֵל הוּא
וּבָא מְאָרֶץ רְחוֹקָה לְמַעַן שְׁמֹךָ. כִּי יִשְׁמְעוּן
אֶת־שְׁמֹךָ הַגָּדוֹל וְאֶת־יָדְךָ הַתְּחוּקָה וְיִרְעוּ
הַנְּטוּיָה וּבָא וְהִתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה. אַתָּה
תִּשְׁמַע הַשָּׁמַיִם מִכּוֹן שִׁבְתֶּךָ וְעָשִׂיתָ כְּכֹל
אֲשֶׁר־יִקְרָא אֵלֶיךָ הַנִּכְרִי לְמַעַן יִדְעוּן
כָּל־עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ אֶת־שְׁמֹךָ לְיִרְאָה אֹתְךָ

⁷ Ideas in this paragraph came from Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks: www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-5771-balak-a-people-that-dwells-alone/.

Israel, and they will recognize that Your Name is attached to this House that I have built.

Melakhim I, 8:41-43

בְּעֵמֶק יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלָדַעַת כִּי־שִׁמָּה נִקְרָא
עַל־הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בְּנִיתִי.
מַלְכִים א' ח:מא-מג

Shlomo HaMelekh hopes to build an empire that will be magnificent and impressive, one that foreigners will hear of and come to see with their own eyes. Once there, they will encounter a kingdom that is both wealthy and knowledgeable, but most significantly, in a direct relationship with G-d.

Mark Twain's famous quote about the immortality of the Jew carries truth.⁸ The Torah⁹ promises us that our people are eternal. This is true, irrespective of the existence of friends and/or allies. But it does not mean we will thrive in isolation, and it does not mean that it will be easy to be alone. But perhaps more importantly, on the ideological level, we can't accomplish our divine mission, to be a "*mamleket kohanim v'goy kadosh*,"¹⁰ without allies and friends. Our goals of Kiddush Hashem and spreading the true faith¹¹ will not be realized if nobody takes notice of who we are, what we have created, and above all, what we have to offer. As Shlomo HaMelekh showed us, perhaps the relationship is circular. Our allies can provide us materials, both physical and intellectual, that increase our country's splendor, and in turn, the nations of the world will then be drawn to come and see our magnificence. However, the circle will only be complete once they have blessed God, fulfilling their true purpose, and ours.¹²

Lessons from the First *Heter Mechirah*

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One of the issues regarding the *shemittah* (sabbatical) year that generates much debate is the permissibility of the *heter mechirah*.¹³ A look back at the debate surrounding the first large scale *heter mechirah* can teach us important lessons for the *shemittah* year and help us gain a better appreciation for the mitzvah.

8 "The Egyptian, the Babylonian, and the Persian rose, filled the planet with sound and splendor, then faded to dream-stuff and passed away; the Greek and the Roman followed; and made a vast noise, and they are gone; other people have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?" Mark Twain, "Concerning The Jews," *Harper's Magazine*, 1899.

⁹ Vayikra 26:39-45, for example.

¹⁰ Shemot, 19:6.

¹¹ Rambam, Hilkhos Melakhim, Chapter 12:1.

¹² Rabbi Ovadiah Seforno to Shemot 19:6, comments on the verse, "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests," writing: "Through this you will be more treasured (*segulah*) than the others, for you will be a nation of priests to understand and to teach all of humanity to call out in the name of God, and to serve Him as one unified group, as will be the nature of the Jewish nation in the future, as it says, (Yeshayahu 61:6), 'And you shall be called the priests of the Lord,' and as it says, (ibid, 2:3), 'for out of Zion shall the Torah come forth.'"

¹³ The sale of land in Israel to a non-Jew to avoid the prohibition of working the land during the *shemittah* year.

During the first aliyah, beginning in 1882, thousands of Jews relocated from Eastern Europe to the Land of Israel, then known as Palestine. The new immigrants, many of whom were involved with Zionist organizations in Europe, wanted to develop and settle the land. They worked tirelessly to transform the barren wasteland and swamps into flourishing communities and blooming fields. But as the *shemittah* year of 5649 (1888/1889) drew near, the settlers were concerned about leaving the land fallow for a full year. They hoped to find a way to continue working the land while not compromising their commitment to Jewish law.

After the leading rabbis living in Palestine refused to offer any leniencies and insisted on an uncompromising observance of the *shemittah* year, the settlers, backed by Baron Rothschild, turned to the European rabbis for their support on the matter. With the approval of Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spektor, one of the leading halakhic authorities of the late 19th century, the suggestion was put forth to sell the land to a non-Jew, thus allowing the fields to be worked even during the *shemittah* year.

This issue erupted into a widespread debate: a group of rabbis supported the *heter mechirah*, while a group opposed it.¹⁴ The supporters were concerned that leaving the land fallow for a full year would spell disaster for the renewed efforts to settle the land. They were therefore willing to put forth a halakhic solution to the problem. The opponents argued that observing *shemittah* in the traditional manner would benefit the farmers as they would receive the blessing reserved for those who perform this mitzvah. However, while the rabbis on either side of the debate reached opposing halakhic conclusions, ultimately, the values underlying their rulings were similar.

Both sides had sincere respect and concern for those settling the land. As evident from their halakhic ruling, the supporters of the *heter mechirah* were willing to create a halakhic loophole in order to protect the settlement. But even the rabbis opposed to the *heter mechirah* supported the effort to resettle the land. They praised the settlers who had come to the land and observed all of the commandments related to the Land of Israel. They thought the settlers were involved in important work and prayed that God bless their efforts. Yet they opposed the *heter* for they believed that observing the *shemittah* year would be beneficial for the land and its settlers because the land would be blessed as a reward. Their unwillingness to advocate for the *heter mechirah* was due to an unwavering commitment to the words of the Torah rather than a lack of concern for the land and its settlers.

Another similarity between the two groups was the desire to observe the *shemittah* year. It had been almost 1800 years since it was last observed on such a large scale, and the opponents of the *heter mechirah* wanted to take advantage of this unique opportunity. They noted that the exile was attributed to the failure to observe the *shemittah* year and that observing the mitzvah would bring an end to the exile. Though the supporters of the *heter mechirah* permitted a loophole to circumvent the prohibitions of working the field during the *shemittah* year, they recognized the imperfect nature of the situation. They concluded their letters of support with the hope that the situation would be different in the future. The *heter* was only to be implemented for that year, and the circumstances would have to be reevaluated in the *shemittah* years to come. While the

¹⁴ The letters expressing both the support and opposition to the *heter mechirah* can be found in *Sefer HaShemittah* written by Rabbi Yechiel Michel Tukachinsky p. 66-70.

supporters of the *heter mechirah* wanted to observe the *shemittah* in a traditional manner, the fear of the consequences of leaving the fields fallow for one year pushed them to allow an exception for the time being.

As the next *shemittah* year approaches, it is appropriate to reflect upon the lessons from the first *heter mechirah*. It is important to remind ourselves to support the development in the Land of Israel and to be invested in the agricultural success of the land. Furthermore, the desire to strive to fulfill G-d's commandments in its fullest should be at the forefront of our thoughts and actions. These two ideals that emerge from each side of the debate should hopefully strengthen our commitment to the Land of Israel and our enthusiasm in the observance of the *shemittah* year.

Eyes Wide Open

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There is not just one type of darkness. There is the dark thicket of a starless nighttime sky, an imposed blackness often associated with fear and danger, perhaps even suffering. When the Jewish tradition associates darkness with the *galut*, exile, we usually envision this sort of oppressive image. But there is another type of darkness as well, a blindness that can exist even in broad daylight. This latter manifestation can be manufactured even with eyes wide open. Perhaps this is the intention of various verses that invoke the image of “faint eyes” in describing *galut*. In fact, the *Midrash Hagadol*, on the verse in Devarim 28:65, picks up on this with the following comment. The verse states, “And among those nations, you will not be calm, nor will your foot find rest. There the Lord will give you a trembling heart and faint eyes.” The Midrash elaborates, “trembling heart—this is fear and weakness; faint eyes—this is the long duration of exile.” As such, we find two potential impacts of *galut*, both equally harmful—trembling heart and faint eyes.

The experience of feeling distant or estranged from Hashem can come from one of two places. It can stem from an imposed darkness, a feeling of abandonment and oppression. Alternatively, it can result from within, from the eye that has become unaccustomed to seeking a relationship with our Creator. This is the eye blinded by preoccupation with life in the exile, distracted by engagement in the surrounding culture. The weakened organ cannot properly focus on the ultimate *geulah*, redemption.

It is perhaps this second aspect of *galut* that has the most profound impact on us living in the 21st century. The potential to become completely absorbed in the opportunities afforded us by modern culture is both tempting and ever-present. Perhaps this is why we recite thrice daily the prayer of *ברחמים לציון בשובך עינינו*, asking Hashem to mercifully open our eyes to His return to Zion. Why not simply *daven* that Hashem return to Zion? Why the need to request that our eyes be opened to His return? It has been suggested that the prayer is emphasizing that the risk of being blind to the progress of history and the unfolding of the *geulah* is great. It is therefore not enough to pray just that Hashem return to Zion. That request is insufficient because it leaves open the possibility that we might be so caught up in and blinded by exile life

that we may actually miss the fulfillment of the prayer. We not only *daven* that the redemption should happen, but also that we should successfully witness its arrival.

Yom Ha'atzmaut provides the perfect opportunity to take a step back, commemorate, observe and celebrate the advances that have been made toward the final *geulah*. Our presence in and sovereignty over the Land of Israel marks an enormous step in the fulfillment of Hashem's promise for the complete and ultimate redemption. Let's not let the chaos of *galut* distract us from recognizing the precious gift that is the State of Israel and let us continue to pray for the ability to open our eyes and pierce through the darkness of exile.

Yom Haatzmaut: An Ahavat Yisrael Dependence Day

Rabbi Reuven Lebovitz

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Yom Haatzmaut marks a day on the Jewish calendar that is enveloped in controversy. Unfortunately, what should be a celebratory day has become one overshadowed with clashes and disputes. There are arguments about whether Yom Haatzmaut should be a day of celebration; whether we should say Hallel and if so, with or without a blessing? Should we say *Tachanun*? Can one shave on Yom Haatzmaut, even though it is during Sefirat Haomer?¹⁵ These common questions call for a reflection on the need for *ahavat Yisrael* (love for other Jews) both specifically on Yom Haatzmaut and, more generally, every day.

The Torah tells us in Vayikra 19:18 that there is a mitzvah "to love your neighbor just like you love yourself." There is a midrash¹⁶ that states that Rabbi Akiva holds that this very mitzvah is a *klal gadol baTorah* (fundamental idea in the Torah). Rabbi Akiva explains that a person should not say, "because I do not care if I am degraded, therefore, I may degrade my friend." This is because if a person belittles someone else they are belittling a creation of Hashem's. This notion is exemplified in *Masechet Shabbat* 31a, where a prospective convert came to Hillel and asked him to teach him the whole Torah while standing on one foot. Hillel responded to him, "do not do to others what you do not want done to you. This is the Torah and the rest is just commentary!" Hillel was indicating that this mitzvah of *ahavat Yisrael* is the essence of the Torah.

The idea conveyed by Hillel is demonstrated in *Masechet Yoma* 9b. The Talmud depicts how before the destruction of the Second Temple, Torah learning, performance of mitzvot, and chessed (acts of kindness) were thriving. So why was it that the Second Temple was destroyed? The Talmud answers that the Second Temple was destroyed because of the baseless hatred that the Jewish people had towards each other. The nonexistence of *ahavat Yisrael* is what led to the destruction of the Second Temple. The loss of our Temple has led to a spiritual deficiency in our nation that has stung us until today. However, we can see that the repercussion for not carrying out this mitzvah extends to our physical destruction as well. This is illustrated in *Masechet Yevamot* 62b, where it states that 24,000 of Rabbi Akiva's students died because they did not show respect

¹⁵ *Yom Haatzmaut* is the day 20th day of the *omer*.

¹⁶ Bereishit Rabbah 24:7.

to one another. These students were the Torah prodigies of their generation, yet due to their lack of *ahavat Yisrael* they were not worthy of living. Interestingly, these two *Mesechtot* are paralleled in that they both describe how Torah learning is meaningless without *ahavat Yisrael*.

Furthermore, the loss of Rabbi Akiva's students is the very reason we mourn for the first 33 days of Sefirat Haomer. During those days, we don't shave¹⁷ in order to exhibit our mourning for their loss. This law's application to Yom Haatzmaut is the subject of a *machloket*. Some hold that shaving is permitted during Yom Haatzmaut,¹⁸ and others say it is forbidden.¹⁹ While each side of the debate has a legitimate halachic basis, the issue should not cause conflict between people or groups of people, especially since the whole reason for our grieving during Sefirat Haomer is due to Rabbi Akiva's students' lack of *ahavat Yisrael*.

We can see that the consequences for the absence of *ahavat Yisrael* are quite harsh. Therefore, we need to pursue a desire for *ahavat Yisrael*. Rav Kook²⁰ famously writes that "if hatred is what brought about the destruction of the Second Temple, then surely love will bring about the construction of the Third Temple." Moreover, Rav Kook profoundly expresses elsewhere²¹ that in order to ensure *ahavat Yisrael*, we need to eliminate the notion of the separate camps in the Jewish community, since the moment we place someone in a different camp they become irrelevant to us. When someone is extraneous to us, the chance of loving them is minimal. Through making each other relevant we will learn to have *ahavat Yisrael*. Consequently, the very fact that we all are Jews is reason enough to love each other, regardless of our differing opinions.

On Yom Haatzmaut, a day that is both celebratory and controversial regarding the Land of Israel, it is worth noting the impact that the Land of Israel has on *ahavat Yisrael*. The *Avnei Nezer*²² quotes the Maharal who portrays how, until Bnei Yisrael entered into the Land of Israel, their responsibility for one another did not take effect. This is because the Land of Israel is what makes Bnei Yisrael "like one man with one heart." Therefore, on Yom Haatzmaut, which is the celebration of Israel's independence, it is absolutely crucial to understand the magnitude of *ahavat Yisrael*, and our dependence on it. The essence of Yom Haatzmaut is perhaps not found in the details of the day itself, but rather in the inspiration leading us toward a greater *ahavat Yisrael*.

Appreciating the Land of Israel

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The Land of Israel lives in the heart of the Jewish people. From our very inception, our collective journey has been intertwined with this special place. In fact, the first time that the Torah informs

¹⁷ *Shulchan Aruch* OC 493:1 and *Rama* ibid.

¹⁸ See *Peninei Halacha* by Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, "Yom Haatzmaut" section.

¹⁹ *Yaskil Avdi* 6:10.

²⁰ *Orot HaKodesh*, Vol. III, pg. 324.

²¹ *Ma'amarei HaRa'ayah*, Vol. I, pg. 76.

²² *Avnei Nezer*, *Yoreh Deah* 126:3-4.

us of G-d's interaction with the first of our forefathers, Avraham Avinu, G-d directs him to travel "to the land which I will show you" (Gen. 12:1). Throughout our history, the prophets and sages have inspired within us a deep love for the land. Why? What makes the land so special?

Highlighting the land in which we live seems so arbitrary. Whether in Cypress, North Dakota or Peru, one can still say the same prayers, eat the same food, and have the same way of life. It is not the land per se that gives flavor to a community, but rather the people who are superimposing their personalities and beliefs upon the place they live. If our homeland is considered to be of such monumental importance, we must understand why.

In the first chapters of the Torah, we find many characters, or groups of people, losing their land. Adam and Chava are kicked out of the Garden, Kayin is forced to be a wanderer, and the entire generation of Noach is wiped away through the means of waters erasing all of the land in the world. Sin continuously seems to induce the punishment of losing one's place. This notion is underscored as well when the Jewish people are exiled from Israel twice. In the other direction, we see times in which one can merit land. For instance the resting place of the forefathers in Me'arat Hamachpeila is an earned place. The question that begs to be answered at this point is why? Why is *land* the specific point of reward or punishment?

The answer to our question can perhaps be found by a major teaching of the Ramban in his *Commentary on the Torah*, Bereishit 2:3. In a discussion about the creation of the world, the Ramban suggests that the six days of creation are a microcosm of the course of history. The Talmud, *Avodah Zarah* 9a, teaches that the Mashiach is supposed to come by the year 6000 of the Jewish calendar and this number can be divided into six portions of 1,000 years each. Each 1,000 years matches one day of creation. He goes on to explain that the years 1000-2000 parallel day two of creation because day two is the day of the waters splitting and the generation of the flood of Noach, lived during those years. Avraham Avinu was born at the end of that era in 1948 of the Jewish calendar, just in time to welcome in day three, the time of land and fruit. The Ramban explains that righteous people will produce good deeds and acts of kindness, which is the fruit of their labor. In other words, the notion of land is a place to facilitate growth in this world. The produce of our world is acts which fuse this world with goodness and righteousness. This stands in stark contrast with the generation of the flood who wreaked havoc upon the world and filled it with darkness and emptiness. Their generation produced no fruit and therefore no longer needed land.

With this new understanding, let's return to our earlier questions. Why do we see such a theme of land in the Torah? The answer is that the world has been given to us to facilitate a relationship with Hashem. We are to work the land of the world and fill it inside and out with rich produce of good deeds in every which way. Whether this is manifest through Torah learning, acts of loving kindness or a simple whispered prayer from our hearts, we have chances to produce fruit all the time. If, however, the fruit are not coming about, then the land is no longer needed. Gan Eden had to expel Adam and Chava because the sin of the tree uprooted the purpose of that existence. The baseless hatred of our people took away our homeland in the times of the Roman Empire. By contrast, the good deeds of Noach in his times and Avraham Avinu in his, earned them both places upon which to live. The Ark was granted to Noach because his righteousness was insular. It was a righteousness that only existed in contrast to the rest of the generation. This is similar to

the Ark, which produced an insular space. Avraham Avinu on the other hand was not an insular person. Just the opposite—his greatness elevated those around him. Therefore, he did not just merit land for himself but rather he was the one who created a forum for the rest of the world to perform acts of righteousness. He was granted the Land of Israel, which would remain the example par excellence of which fruits of righteousness can be produced.

Finally, though the Jewish people remain in the times of exile, the opportunity of having the Land of Israel must open our eyes to a window of opportunity. For almost 2,000 years we have groped in the darkness of the world, striving to find a place to stand and join together to once again be a people in our land. With the State of Israel comes an opportunity to fulfill a purpose of being a shining light to all those around us, just as our forefather, Avraham Avinu, was. May we continue to be and increasingly fulfill that purpose. *הג שמח!*

"ציפית לישועה"? הכיצד?

ר' אפרים רימל

אברך, ישיבה אוניברסיטה תורה מציון כולל בשיקגו

הגמרא במסכת שבת דף לא עמוד א מצינת

אמר רבא: בשעה שמכניסין אדם לדין אומרים לו: נשאת ונתת באמונה? קבעת עתים לתורה? עסקת בפריה ורבייה? ציפית לישועה? פלפלת בחכמה? הבנת דבר מתוך דבר?

השאלות האלו כולן, מתייחסות לעקרונות חשובים בדרכו של האדם המאמין בקודשא בריך הוא ואורייתא, ולא רק בקיום נקודתי של מצוות מסוימות. לכן השאלות שנשאלות הן לא על קיום אלא על התעסקות, חיים המונחים לאור עקרונות אלו.

רש"י שם מסביר שהשאלה של "ציפית לישועה" מתייחסת לכך שיש לצפות להתגשמות דברי הנביאים. אבל דבריו אלו של רש"י לא כל כך ברורים, הרי מצווים אנו להאמין שתבוא ישועה לישראל לעתיד לבוא, מה כל כך מיוחד בציפיה זו? הרי זהו הבסיס לאמונתנו שתבוא ישועה לישראל! לזאת מתייחס הר"ן על אתר:

ועוד צריך לבאר ציפית לישועה **בימיך**. ולא אמר ציפית שתבוא ישועה לישראל, דמי שאינו מאמין זה, אפיקורס הוא, שהאפיקורסים אינן מאמינין שתבוא ישועה לעולם לישראל.

לאור זאת מבאר הר"ן שהציפיה היא לזה שהישועה תגיע בימינו. לא רק שתהיה גאולה מתישהו, אלא ציפיה שהיא תגיע עוד בימינו.

אבל השאלה היא, מהו היסוד של השאלה הזאת? מאיפה נובע החיוב לציפיה שכזו, על בסיס מה?

הרב יצחק מקורביל זצ"ל בספרו ספר מצוות קטן, מבאר שהבסיס לציפיה זו היא מהדיבר הראשון בעשרת הדיברות -

שכשם שיש לנו להאמין שהוציאנו ממצרים דכתיב אנכי ה' אלהיך אשר הוצאתיך וגומר. ועל כרחין מאחר שהוא דיבור, הכי קאמר, כשם שאני רוצה שתאמינו כי שאני הוצאתי אתכם כך אני רוצה שתאמינו כי שאני ה' אלהיכם ואני עתיד לקבץ אתכם ולהושיעכם. וכן יושיענו ברחמינו שנית. (מצוות התלויות בלב, מצוה א').

ההבנה הבסיסית היא שלאדם מישראל צריך שתהיה ידיעה כי הקב"ה הוא הגואל היחידי של אומתנו, והוא זה שגאל אותנו בעבר ממצרים, והוא זה שיגאלנו לעתיד לבוא.

השאלה הנשאלת היא האם יש עלינו לעשות משהו עם הציפיה הזאת? האם היא צריכה להיות אקטיבית או שהציווי יכול להישאר רק במחשבה?

מסופר על בעל החפץ חיים, הרב ישראל מאיר מראדין זצ"ל שכל לילה לפני שהיה הולך לישון היה מכין ליד מיטתו את בגדיו היפים ביותר על מנת שיהיה מוכן לביאת המשיח אפילו באמצע הלילה, ולא יצטרך להתמהמה ולו לרגע קט ויהיה מוכן מיד לילך לארץ ישראל. כמו כן ככהן היה מתעסק תמיד בסדר קדשים מכיוון שתכף יגיע המשיח ויבנה המקדש ונצטרך לדעת איך מקריבים קרבנות.

הרב אברהם יצחק הכהן קוק זצ"ל מבאר בהרחבה נקודה זו באומרו, כי הציפיה צריכה להוביל למעשה. בספר אוצרות הראי"ה הובא מאמר מהרב קוק ובו הוא מסביר את השימוש דוקא במילה "ציפיה":

שואלים לאדם צפית לישועה ולא קוית. צפיה היא מגורת צפה. תפקיד הצופה להשתמש בכל מאורע שהוא להזהיר על תקלה ולעורר למפעל של ישועה. וכך עלינו להשתמש בכל המאורעות שבועולם, שעל ידם תוכל לבוא או לצמוח תשועה לישראל. אנו אמונים על האמונה שכל דבר שיוכל להועיל לבני הארץ ולחזוק האומה צפון בו דבר ה' לתחית הקודש בארץ הקודש. (אוצרות הראי"ה חלק ב' עמ' שלג)

דבריו של הרב קוק בעצם מטווים לנו את הדרך בה עלינו לחיות חיים של "ציפית לישועה". עלינו לראות בכל ארוע שמתרחש ברחבי העולם איך הוא מתקשר לתהליך הגאולה והישועה של עם ישראל. הרב קוק שחי ערב תקומת מדינת ישראל הבין שהמאורעות שהתרחשו בימיו הינם חלק מהותי מתהליך הגאולה של עם ישראל. מאורעות דוגמת מלחמת העולם הראשונה, הצהרת בלפור, מאורעות ת"ח, ת"ט, ות"פ"ט, ועוד הם כולם חלק מהמסע אל עבר הישועה. בודאי דבריו אלו של הרב קוק נכונים אף להכרזה על הקמת מדינה יהודית בארץ ישראל – יריית הפתיחה של הגאולה בימינו.

אנו שזוכים לחיות בימים אלו שבהם יש לנו ב"ה בית קבוע בארץ הקודש, חובה עלינו לראות את כל המאורעות המתרגשים עלינו ולהשכיל ולהפנים כיצד הם כולם חלק מתוכנית אלוקית אל עבר גאולתנו השלמה, במהרה בימינו.

Between Israel and the Diaspora: A Shaliach's Reflections

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A few months ago, at the beginning of Shevat, my family and I returned from more than two years of *shlichut* in Toronto. We served there as part of Yeshiva University Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov. Our work there, apart from being extremely fruitful and beneficial on a personal level, also raised my awareness of relations between Israel and the Diaspora: as they are, and as they ought to be.

When we turn to look on reality as it is, we find quickly enough that one of the major challenges we are facing is the cultural contrast. Of course, this is hardly a new problem; already in the time of the Amoraim we can see that such differences created a chasm between the communities. Thus, for example, Rabbi Zeira declared, "How foolish are these Babylonians, who eat bread with bread!"²³ The Gemara continues to explain that Rabbi Zeira was referring to a specific food that was eaten in

²³ Beitzah 16a.

the Babylonian Diaspora. Obviously, Rabbi Zeira the sage was hinting to some deeper meaning²⁴—but he used a common idiom, which demonstrates widespread contempt towards the Babylonians and their lifestyle. This attitude was not one-sided—the Babylonians, boosted by their pristine pedigree, claimed that in comparison to them, the Jews sitting in Israel were similar to mixed dough.²⁵ Again, without entering the halachic and other evaluations of this statement, it also contributed toward feelings of estrangement and distance between the communities.

The cultural differences between Jews living in Israel and those abroad today are no less striking than they were at the time of Rabbi Zeira—from food to clothing to language to manners. Naturally, these differences lead each side to disregard the other, causing emotional distance far beyond the physical one. These details can easily create a wide chasm; unfortunately, too many times they do.

That is what there is now—but as in many other cases, the difficulties and the challenges can give us a roadmap to what ought to be. The same differences that seem to us as the source of the problem can be seen, from a different angle, as the most important value of the relationship between the communities.

I would like to briefly mention a few areas in which I think that Jews in Israel and in the Diaspora can contribute to each other:

- A. Israel as a physical refuge: The lowest form of relationship is a physical give and take, but nonetheless it is a very strong one. As Rav Yosef Dov Soloveichik emphasized in *Kol Dodi Dofek*, the bond connecting the Jews is not only the covenant of destiny and shared values, but also the covenant of history and shared fate. This common cast as a persecuted and fought-against people is the first motivation to show a united front. The contributions made by each side to our national defense are clear—the Israeli Jewish community gives its efforts and, if needed, its blood, to keep our homeland open to any Jew in the world, and the Diaspora Jews must help with any means possible.
- B. On a higher plane, Israel can be seen as the Jewish national center. This is the place where the ancient Jewish language can retain its vitality,²⁶ and the Jewish rhythm of life prevails, even among non-observant Jews. From this angle, the role of the *shaliach* is to reconnect the individual Jews living in exile with the Jewish national center located in Israel,²⁷ a necessary act for both sides—for the former to keep their identity as part of a nation, and for the latter to keep its members alive.
- C. On yet a higher plane, the connection between the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael and abroad cannot be summarized in physical terms or even in cultural terms; its highest end is the establishment of "a priestly kingdom and a holy nation,"²⁸ led by the Divine law—the Torah. Our struggle toward realizing this goal is long and complex. A crucial part of this is to be

²⁴ See, for example, *Ateret Tzvi* (Taksin) 39a. It is also important to note Rabbi Zeira's Babylonian origin.

²⁵ *Kiddushin* 71a.

²⁶ See *Peirush Hamishnayot, Terumot* 1:1.

²⁷ See *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Shegagot* 13:2.

²⁸ *Shemot* 19:6.

accomplished in Yerushalayim, from which the word of G-d shall go forth,²⁹ but history has taught us that the word of G-d does sometime reveal itself in exile – such as the most important halachic work, the Talmud itself. In this mission of discovering our destination, both sides must cooperate, and abandon the claims for supremacy for the sake of humility, so that between one and the other the conclusion will be reached,³⁰ “and one will call to the other, declaring: Holy, Holy, Holy!”³¹

²⁹ Yeshayah 2:3.

³⁰ *Pesachim* 88a.

³¹ Yeshayah 6:3.