



GISHMEI BRACHA

Umbrellas and raincoats have been a necessity for those fortunate to have spent this year in the Holy Land. Over the winter, Israel was blessed with the most rainfall in over 50 years! The seasons are now transitioning from *choref* to *aviv*, from winter to spring. And while the contrast in the Diaspora may be limited to a difference in temperature, the Jews of Israel experience a dramatic change in weather patterns, where stormy rain clouds are replaced by bountiful sunshine. This transition is most poignantly expressed in the change of our *nusach hatfillot*, removing *mashiv haruach* and altering the *vten tal u'matar* in our Shmone Esrei. By reading our texts carefully, we will notice that these are not the only references to the rain of Israel in our prayers and literature. We embrace the winter with Shimini Atzeret's *Tefilat*

Geshem, we welcome the summer with Pesach's *Tefilat Tal*, and signifying their importance, the chazzan dons a *kittel*. Inside the Holy of Holies on *Yom Kippur*, the Kohen Gadol would pray for the upcoming year's rainfall (*Seder Ha'Avodah, Nusach Sefard*). A large portion of *Mesechet Ta'anit* is involved with the additional prayers and fasts established in order to supplicate G-d for rain, and the Amoraim (*Ta'anit* 7a,7b) make statements as remarkable as:

אמר רב יהודה גדול יום הגשמיים כיום שניתנה
בו תורה.

R. Yehuda said: the day that it rains is as great as the day that the Torah was given.

אמר רבי חמא בר' חנינה גדול יום הגשמיים
כיום שנבראו שמים וארץ.

R. Chama b. R. Chanina said: the day that it rains is as great as the day that the heavens and the earth were created.

The list goes on... Why does the rain of Israel play such a central role?

We could ask a more fundamental question: For a nation of farmers who have an entire order of Mishna, *Seder Zeraim*, dedicated to their agricultural endeavors, a desert land with little access to water seems to be a poor choice of location. Why in fact did G-d choose Israel? The answer to this question might be hidden in the *pesukim* of Parshat Eikev (Deut. 11:11-12):

והארץ, אשר אתם עברים נסעה לרשותה--
ארון הרים, ובקעת; למטר השמים, תשתחה-
פְּנֵים. אָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר-ה' אֱלֹקֶיךְ דִּרְשׁ אֶתְּהָ: תְּמִימָה,
עַנִּי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךְ בָּה-—מְרַשֵּׁית הָשָׁנָה, וְשַׁד אַחֲרִית
שָׁנָה.

But the land you are about to cross into and possess, a land of hills and valleys, soaks up its water from the rains of heaven. It is a land which the Lord your God looks after, on which the Lord your

God always keeps His eye, from year's beginning to year's end.

We see that it was no unfortunate coincidence that the Jewish people landed in the desert land of Israel. G-d tells us that is specifically because He cherishes Bnei Yisrael that He puts them in a desert land. People with an unlimited water source will never turn to G-d for help, will never look to the skies for rain; their life resources are streaming by their feet. In contrast, says G-d, settling Bnei Yisrael in a desert region will allow them to turn to the One above for its sustenance, pray to G-d for rain, and always know from where their livelihood stems.

In these few *pesukim*, G-d reveals an important message. Our dependency on Him is not an inadvertent arrangement, nor a happenstance coincidence. Rather it is a conduit that affords us the opportunity to turn, beseech, and ultimately connect with G-d. Behind every challenge is a blessing. A blessing from the One above, reminding us that He is present and readily available. Earlier in Parshat Eikev, G-d cautions about the challenges of wealth. All too often does the wealthy man forget Who provided his wealth, while the destitute fellow is in constant connection with G-d, always requesting His basic needs.

G-d's settling His agricultural nation in a desert land was the best way to guarantee the nation's constant beseeching of His heavens for rain. Rain does not merely sustain our physical survival in Israel, it is at the core of our spiritual existence. The rain of Israel is hand-delivered by G-d in response to the *tefillot* of *klal Yisrael*, and each drop penetrates the soil and imbues the land with *kedushah*. The Land of Israel is no desert — it is a flowing oasis of prayer.

Although for thousands of years Jews in the Diaspora prayed for rain in Israel, the true feeling of dependency on Israel's rain had not been on the Jews' consciousness until the recent resettlement of the Land in the past hundred years. The Jews of Israel are once again blessed to live with an active feeling of dependency on G-d's rain. The special *nuschaot* in the *tefillot* of Eretz Yisrael that address the need for

in every Israeli household, multiple swimming pools per hotel, and drip irrigation across every farm in Israel — the Land of Israel is more hydrated today than many western countries. What reason is there to continue praying for rain?

While this may seem true, and our dependency on rainfall has diminished, the Land of Israel does not allow its inhabitants to merely sit back and enjoy the Land. She challenges her people. She challenges them so they turn to G-d. Whether this challenge is manifest in rain, security concerns, or the difficulty of making a living, the Land will forever force its people to look to G-d for help. The very fabric of the Land of Israel is imbued with a connection to its Creator, and she expects no less of her people.

אָשָׁא עַנְיִ אֶל הַרְמִים מֵאַיִן יָבוֹא עֹזְרִי עֹזְרִי
מעם ה' עֹשֶׂה שְׁמִינִים וְאַרְצָן.

*I will lift up my eyes to the mountains.
From where does my help come? My help
comes from the Lord, who made heaven
and earth.*

Psalm 121:1-2

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rain, such as the addition of “*g'shamim b'itam*” (rains in their proper time) in *Birkas Hachodesh* and the distinct “*Aneinu*” in *Shmone Esrei*, highlight the unique connection with G-d only the Jew living in Israel can experience.

Today in 2020, the advent of modern technologies and desalination plants has seemingly reduced Israel's reliance on G-d's rain. An endless water tap

The Jews of Israel endure struggles and challenges, but it is for this exact reason that Jews choose to live there. The flip side of every challenge is a blessing — the opportunity to look to G-d for assistance. While the Land of Israel may not have an elaborate highway system nor many rushing rivers, her humble roads whisper to G-d as they traverse the Jerusalem hills, and her rivers rush not with water but with the heartfelt prayers of every Jew in Israel. May we all be *zoche* to internalize that the greatest blessing in life is not to receive rain, but to need rain — *gishmei bracha*.