



# שמע קולנו

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## A SET PLACE FOR TEFILLAH

*Rabbi Michael Taubes*

The Torah tells us that on the morning following the destruction of Sedom and Amorah and the other wicked cities, Avraham Avinu arose early and went back to the place where he had previously stood in the presence of Hashem (Bereshis, 19:27). The Gemara in Berachos (daf 6) explains that this is where Avraham had davened to Hashem, and we therefore see that Avraham had a specific set place, a Makom Kavua, for his Tefillah. The Gemara thus derives that anyone who establishes a fixed place for davening will be helped by the G-D of Avraham. On the next page (daf 7), The Gemara adds that when one has a fixed place to daven, his enemies will fall away.

The Gemara earlier (daf 6) indicates that it is specifically in the Beis HaKnesses that one's Tefillos are heard because this is where Hashem is to be found; it seems clear that this is where one's Makom Kavua for davening should be. The Yerushalmi in Berachos (Perek Daled, halacha daled, daf 35) likewise states that one must daven in a place set aside for tefillah, based on a Posuk elsewhere in the Torah (shemos 20:21). Therefore, the Gemara in Sanhedrin (daf 17) says that it is improper for a Talmid Chochom to live in a city which has no Beis HaKnesses. The Tosefta in Bava Metzia (Perek 12, halacha 11) says that the residents of a city may compel one another to build a Shul; the Rambam (perek 11, hilchos tefillah, halacha aleph) writes that wherever ten Jews live, they must set up a Beis HaKnesses where they can come together to daven.

The Shulchan Aruch (siman 90, seif 9) therefore rules that one must make every effort to daven in a Shul; the Magen Avraham (sham, seif katan 15) adds that even if one can get a Minyan together in his home, it is still preferable to daven in a Shul. Interestingly, the Beis Yosef quotes from the Geonim that even if one can't make it to Shul to daven

with the Tzibbur, one should still go to daven in the Shul building, even as a Yachid, because it is a place set aside for Tefillah. The Lechem Mishneh (perek 11, hilchos tefillah, halacha aleph) asserts that this is the opinion of the Rambam too, and the Shulchan Aruch rules accordingly. The Magen Avraham (sham seif katan 33) notes, however, that if one must daven at home, one should still have a set place there for his Tefillah.

The Mishnah Berurah (sham seif katan 28) writes that if one has a choice of several Shuls in which to daven, one should go to the one which has a large crowd because of the idea of B'rov Am Hadras Melech, meaning that Hashem is glorified more by a larger multitude. Even if there are wicked people who are part of the Tzibbur, the Be'er Heitev quotes that one should still daven in Shul with them. The Sha'arei Teshuvah (sham, seif katan 2), however, discusses just how many such people may be in the Shul before one ought to leave it. He then adds, as does the Mishnah Berurah, that if because of the crowd there is a great deal of disturbance and confusion and it is thus difficult to hear the davening and the Kerias HaTorah, it is then preferable to find a Minyan, albeit a much smaller one, somewhere else. Rav Moshe Feinstein, however, (shu"t igros Moshe, orach chayim chelek 1 siman 99) advises one to be hesitant about leaving a Shul, saying that by staying with a Shul whose members perhaps do not act properly, one can influence these people and show them the right path, and thus should not leave; this is provided, of course, that the actual running of the Shul is done in accordance with Halacha.

Once one is in a proper Shul, is it necessary to have a Makom Kavua there? Rabbeinu Yonah in Berachos (d"h "kol hakovea" daf 3B bidapei harif) says that since the entire Shul is a Makom Tefillah, one need not be insistent upon always sitting in the same place; the whole Shul is one's Makom Kavua. However, the aforementioned Yerushalmi

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states that even within the Shul one must specify a place for himself to daven, based upon the practice of Dovid HaMelech ( Shmuel Bet, 15, 32) , who would always bow and worship in the same place. This view seems to be accepted by the Rosh in Berachos (perek aleph siman 7). The Rambam ( perek hey, hilchos tefillah halacha 6) likewise stresses that one should always daven in the same Makom Kavua; the Hagahos Maimoniyos (sham, os 10) spells out that even within the Shul itself one should not change one's place. This is the opinion accepted by the Shulchan Aruch (orach chayim sham seif 19) which states that it is not sufficient to simply choose a shul, but even within the Shul one must have a Makom Kavua. It is worth noting, however, that the Magen Avraham (sham seif katan 34) suggests that anywhere within 4 Amos (about 6-8 feet) of one's usual place is still considered one's Makom Kavua; the Mishnah Berurah (sham seif katan 60) accepts this view.

## ACHDUS

*Dovie Neuburger*

“vayih riv bein roeh mikneh avram v'roeh miknah lot v'haknani v'haprizi az yoshev b'aretz”

After Avraham returns from Egypt with all his newly acquired wealth and settles in *Eretz Yisroel*, the torah records a dispute that takes place between the shepherds of Avraham and the shepherds of Lot. Both Rashi and the Seforno present the story in the following way. Avraham's shepherds were careful to muzzle their sheep so that the sheep wouldn't eat from property not belonging to Avraham. On the other hand, Lot's shepherds did not care if their sheep were stealing from another's land, claiming, since Hashem was going to give the whole land to Avraham anyway, it did not matter where the sheep grazed.

The trouble with this *pasuk* is that “v'hakinani v'haprizi az yoshev b'aretz” seemingly has no relevance to the dispute between the shepherds. Why did the torah feel the need for this juxtaposition? Many of the *rishonim* comment on this awkwardness. Rashi and the Ramban both say that it was a counter to the argument of the shepherds of Lot. The end of the *pasuk* shows that Avraham had not yet merited the land from Hashem, and therefore the shepherds were not permitted to take the grass from what would become their fields. R' Menachem Beker aptly answers this in his sefer *Parparos L'torah* which sums up the ideas of many *miforshim*. He answers that when two brothers fight

it is always terrible, but the Torah is pointing out how much worse it is when their enemies are around. The enemies of certain groups wait for internal upheavals and arguments in those groups for the chance to attack and wipe these groups out while they are involved in civil war. So too, when we, *Klal Yisroel*, fight among ourselves, our enemies rejoice and feel invited to antagonize us. The *Medrash* says “c'shemirivim achim-misyashvim hanachrim”- when brothers fight(b'nai yisroel) strangers (foreigners) settle. When there is *machlokes* in the Jewish camp the result is “v'haknani v'haprizi az yoshev b'aretz”

The Seforno sees this juxtaposition in a different light. The Seforno claims that it indicates that the surrounding nations were frightened because they reasoned, “if these two brothers cannot even get along with each other, then they will definitely not be able to get along with us.”

We are living through a time when an enemy nation (or non-nation!), seeks to inhabit our land and thus bring about the demise of the Jewish People. Indeed, what unfolds before our eyes threatens to be another era of “v'hakinani v'haprizi az yoshev b'aretz.” If we take these understandings of the *smichut psukim* to heart, we will redouble our efforts at Jewish unity, especially within Eretz Yisrael to forestall the tragedy of losing our land.

## BRIS MILAH

*Avi Sebbag*

The year is 2048, Avraham is 99, and Sarah is 89, And Hashem comes to them saying you're going to have a child! Sarah laughs! Does this make sense? I've been barren for 90 years and now I'm going to have a child? Sure enough it says Hashem remembered Sarah and she gave birth to a boy. Avraham named him Yitzchak; on the eighth day Avraham gave him a brit milah and made a feast. There are many questions regarding brit milah: why the eighth day? Is there a source to the Bagels, cream cheese, locks, and the occasional rugalech after the milah? And what message is the milah trying to send to the Jewish people.

There are many opinions, about why the eighth day. According to Avudraham, when the Mohel says *hava baruch*, the gematria of *hava* is Hey (5) bet (2) and Aleph (1) which equals 8; this refers to the eighth day in which you should make a brit milah.

Another opinion is referring to the knife the Mohel uses, called an *izemel*. If you break down the word to *ize* and *mel*, the gematria for *ize* (*aleph zayin*), which means then, is 8, so it means then, on eighth day *mel* (*mem lamed*) you should do the circumcision. According to the Gemara in megilah daf 17b, brit milah requires a healing process. The eighth bracha in shmoneh esrei is *refuah*, the Gemara says the bracha was put there as a source for Milah on the eighth day. Another and final source is according to the Devarim Rabbah, who says the reason we wait 8 days is because Hashem has pity on the baby, before that it does not have enough strength but on the eighth day it has enough strength.

## THE FIRST COMMAND- MENT\*

*Kobe Kahn*

There is hardly a section in this week's parashah (ed. note: Parshas Lech Lecha) that does not contain an explicit reference to the holy land. One could even say that Eretz Yisrael is the main theme of the parashah. Thus, my dilemma this week was not how to find a reference to Eretz Yisrael but how to choose between them all. I decided to keep it plain and simple and start at the beginning.

Hashem commands Avraham, *Lech lecha ma'artzicha imimolditicha umibais avicha el ha'aretz asher ar'eka*—go forth from your land... to the land that I will show you (12:1). Rav meir Yechiel of Ostrovitz points out something so obvious and significant that one can only wonder why no one mentioned it before: **These words constitute the first mitzvah ever given to a Jew!** Yes, the first thing God ever said to Avraham, the first Jew, was, "Leave your birthplace and immigrate to My special Land." One would have thought that belief in God, rejection of idolatry, or some other cardinal, religious principle would have been the first commandment (as we find in the Ten commandments). Furthermore, one would have expected God to introduce Himself to Avraham, as He did to Moshe Rabbeinu at the Burning Bush. Instead, when it comes to Avraham, there are no introductions, no profound opening statements, just *lech lecha*.

Why is this so? Why did God choose to begin Judaism with *Go forth to the Land*? R. Yehuda Halevi, the author of *sefer hakuzari*, provides a beautiful answer:

You find that after Avraham - the most exceptional person (of his time) - climbed the ladder of perfection and became eligible to cling to Godliness, he was transferred from his land to Eretz Yisreal, **the only place where he could reach absolute perfection**. This is exactly what a farmer does. When he finds the root of a good, fruit-bearing tree in parched soil, he transfers it to workable soil, which will naturally help it prosper. He nurtures it there until it becomes one of the trees of the garden, instead of the wild shrub that it was until now. (He helps it) become a tree that generates many other, similar trees, instead of one that sprouts accidentally in a random place, as it did until now. The same thing happened with the descendants of Avraham regarding prophecy. As long as they were in Eretz Yisrael, many of them prophesied; and many factors aided them—(the laws of) purity, Divine service, sacrifices, and most of all, the proximity of the she3chinah. (Kuzari 2:14)

In other words, although Avraham had attained high levels of perfection outside the Land, God knew that he would be able to fulfill his destiny and attain true perfection only in Eretz Yisrael. This is why He (God) did not introduce Himself to Avraham first, or begin with some lofty commandment. All of that would come later. First, the conditions had to be right. Avraham had to leave the defiled lands of exile and enter his natural habitat, where he could thrive and grow, and produce offspring that could do the same.

Think about it. As we all know, Avraham was doing some very important things in Chutz Laaretz. He was discovering his creator, fighting idolatry, converting people to monotheism, performing acts of kindness, etc. nonetheless, God said to him, "This is all fine and dandy, but you're doing it in the wrong place. You can accomplish so much more in My special Land."

For years, people failed to make aliyah primarily for materialistic reasons. Today, however, when one can live quite comfortably here in Eretz Yisrael (baruch Hashem), the major deterrent is spiritual complacency. People feel that they have it all in Chutz Laaretz—frum communities, Torah learning (like daf yomi), chesed organizations, kiruv, kosher restaurants, etc. What Lech Lecha teaches us is that

\*This Dvar Torah appears in "Eretz Yisrael in the Parshah" by Rabbi Moshe D. Lichtman

no matter how high one can climb on the ladder of perfection in Chutz Laaretz, one can always climb higher in God's Chosen Land. Yes, the first divine command ever given to a Jew was Lech Lecha, because Eretz Yisrael is the prerequisite for all of Judaism.

## THE POWER OF SPEECH

*Rabbi Elihu Abbe*

A number of years ago I was zoche to be at the tish of a chassidisherebbe. To be honest, I don't remember anything that he discussed. But there was one thing that was so powerful that it will be hard to forget. The rebbe, sitting majestically at the head of the table with a serene warmth of spirituality that was almost tangible, began to say the dvar torah. "If one does," his voice beginning to tremble, "an aveirah," and with complete trepidation "chasveshalom."

Recently, I went over to Rav Willig in the bais medrash to ask him a question. He was learning a Ritva, and when I was in earshot, I heard him sing out, "Zukt the heilige Ritva." There are few greater ways to gain an appreciation for the Ritva than to hear one's respected rebbe sing the words "heilige Ritva", expressing his own deep respect for one of the gedolei harishonim.

The words and sentences that we hear are saturated with values. If, for example, one refers to a wealthy man as "successful" and then mentions a talmid chacham without any positive adjectives, he is teaching others to value money more than torah. But if one praises the talmid chacham for his torah and the wealthy man for his chessed, he has taught the beautiful lesson of the tremendous value of torah and kindness.

Psychologists conducted a study in which they paid some people \$1 and others \$20 to make a statement that they strongly disagreed with. After a while they asked them whether they still disagreed with the statement as strongly as they had previously. Those who were paid 20\$ affirmed that they had not changed their minds. But those who were paid 1\$ had moderately changed their position and didn't feel as strongly opposed to the statement as they had originally. The researchers explained that this phenomenon is based on an idea called cognitive dissonance. The \$20 group told themselves that they were only saying the statement because they were being paid well and not because they identified in any way with the statement. However,

the \$1 group couldn't tell themselves that they were making the statement because of good pay. They had to deal with an internal contradiction. On one hand, they said the statement, and on the other hand, they strongly disagreed with it. Subconsciously, in order to partially resolve the contradiction, they began to feel less opposed to the statement.

The words we speak can have an even greater effect on us than the words we hear. The values we speak of are slowly but surely internalized within ourselves. This can be a powerful and capable tool that we can use to internalize ideas that we already know intellectually. If we continually use words that show respect for our true values, we can bring our recognition of what's truly important to a much deeper level.

This idea appears repeatedly in Sefer Bereishis. Last week, in Parshas Lech Lecha, after Avraham rescues Lot from the four kings, the king of Sodom says to Avraham "*ten li hanefesh viharchush kach lach*". Avraham declines the offer and returns everything to the king with the explanation, "*vilo somar ani he'esharti es Avram*". Rashi explains that Avraham didn't want the king of Sodom to say that it was he, rather than Hashem, who had made him rich. This seems very difficult to understand. Avraham had just defeated an army of four powerful kings in a war that was purely miraculous. It was clear to everyone that it was Hashem who had enabled him to win the war and capture the riches. Everyone knew that it was Hashem who made him rich. Why would it bother Avraham if one foolish, evil king of Sodom said that it was he who had enriched him? We see that the statement of one person denying the miraculous hand of Hashem can have an effect. It can take away the clarity that would otherwise prevail. And again, in Parshas Vayeira, we see the same idea. Lot's daughters each have sons from their father. The older daughter names her son Moav, directly referring to the inappropriate way the child was fathered. The younger daughter modestly names her son Amon, concealing that fact. Years later, when Klal Yisrael enter Eretz Yisrael, Hashem rewards Amon for that modesty by commanding Klal Yisrael not to attack Amon in any way (Rashi). It's possible that just the act of Lot's daughter giving her son an appropriate name gave Amon the merit to deserve this reward. But maybe it's more than that. Perhaps Amon attained a level of modesty over time due to the fact that they constantly referred to their nation by a name that symbolizes that modesty.

Yehiratzon that we should be zoche to speak and hear words that will strengthen our connection to the RibbonoShelOlam