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Haftarat Tazria: Sanctified Soil

After experiencing his miraculous cure from *tzara'at* in the waters of the *Yarden*, Na'aman takes leave of the prophet Elisha to return to his native Aram. He professes absolute belief in *Hashem*, renouncing his previous idolatrous ways and thus accepting upon himself the status of a *geir toshav* (see *Gittin* 57b), and asking forgiveness in advance for future forced participation in the pagan rites of his land. At the same time, while Elisha emphatically rejects Na'aman's attempts to shower gifts upon him, Na'aman asks permission of Elisha to return to Aram with two mule loads worth of earth.

As the text strongly implies, the commentators (Rashi, Radak) explain that Na'aman wished to take earth from *Eretz Yisrael* for use in building a *mizbeach* to *Hashem* in Aram.¹ This brings to mind a later historical event, namely the construction of the synagogue of *Shaf Ve-Yativ* in Nahardea during the Babylonian exile. According to Rashi (*Megillah* 29a s.v. *de-shaf*), this synagogue was constructed by the exiles who left *Eretz Yisrael* together with Yechaniah, King of Yehudah, with stones and earth that they brought with them from *Eretz Yisrael*. Rashi writes that this was a fulfillment of the *pasuk* in *Tehillim*, “*ki ratzu avadekha et avaneha ve-et afarah yechoneinu*” – “For your servants hold her stones dear and they cherish her dust” (102:15).²

Na'aman's request appears to presuppose that earth taken from *Eretz Yisrael* would retain its unique status even when brought to *Chutz La-Aretz*.³ This is actually the subject of a dispute among halakhic authorities. *Mishneh La-Melekh* (commentary to Rambam *Hilkhot Bikurim* 2:9 s.v. *ve-da*) presumes, in the context of agricultural laws applicable in *Eretz Yisrael*, that soil from *Chutz La-Aretz* arriving in *Eretz Yisrael* on a boat attains the sanctity of *Eretz Yisrael*. Similarly, earth originating in *Eretz Yisrael* loses its sanctity upon reaching foreign territory. This follows the simple reading of the *mishnah* (*Challah* 2:2), that rules that soil from *Chutz La-Aretz* arriving in *Eretz Yisrael* on a boat is obligated in *terumot* and subject to the laws of *shemittah*.

Mikdash David (*Zeraim, Terumot*, 45:1) takes the opposite position, based on a passage in the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Challah* 4:4).⁴ The *Yerushalmi* indicates that if the Jordan River overflows into Syrian territory and deposits earth from *Eretz Yisrael* in Syria, then that earth has the sanctity of *Eretz Yisrael* as far as the laws of *terumot* and *shemittah*. Once the earth of *Eretz Yisrael* has been sanctified, that status cannot be removed by relocating the earth to *Chutz La-Aretz*. *Mikdash David* notes that in

¹ *Ba'al Ha-Turim* (*Shemot* 28:7) views Na'aman's request as an embracing of the *kehunah*. He contrasts the sons of Eli, who degraded the institution of *kehunah*, and were therefore punished, with Na'aman, who through this request embraced the *kehunah* and was rewarded by coming closer to the *Shekhinah* and having descendants who learned Torah. *Tzitz Eliezer* (13:71) notes that apparently the *Ba'al Ha-Turim* had an alternate text of the *gemara* in *Gittin*, indicating that it was the descendants of Na'aman, and not of Haman, who learned Torah in Benei Brak.

² See also R. Shimon Krasner (*Nachalat Shimon, Melakhim Bet*, vol. 1, pp. 317–318). *Chazal* indicate that the rocks of *Eretz Yisrael* are physically distinct from other rocks. *Tosafot* (*Ketubot* 112a s.v. *R. Chanina*) quote a *Tanchuma* on *Parashat Shelach* that R. Chanina realized that he had entered *Eretz Yisrael* once the rocks that he was passing became heavier.

³ R. Yitzchak Sorotzkin (*Rinat Yitzchak, Melakhim*, 269–270) quotes sources that suggest that Na'aman requested the soil because he wished to erect a *bamat yachid*, a private *bamah*, which was only permissible in *Eretz Yisrael*.

⁴ R. Yechiel Michel Tuktsinski (*Gesher Ha-Chayyim* vol. 1 27:10) cites *Tzafnat Paneach* (*Terumot* 1:22–23) as being inclined toward this position as well.

the opposite case, foreign soil brought into *Eretz Yisrael* may still attain a sanctified status in the same way that, according to one opinion, foreign lands could be conquered and given the halakhic status of *Eretz Yisrael* (based on *Yerushalmi Challah* 2:1).⁵

The *Mikdash David's* approach, which provides insight into Na'aman's request, also sheds light on a practice recorded by Rema in *Hilkhot Aveilut* (*Yoreh De'ah* 363:1). Rama, based on *Ohr Zarua* (*Aveilut* 419), cites a custom of placing earth from *Eretz Yisrael* in a grave at the time of burial.⁶ R. Avraham Malkho (*Shulchan Gavo'ah*, *Yoreh De'ah* 363:10), writing in early eighteenth century Greece, observes that in his time and place (Salonica) they tried to obtain earth from *Tzefat* and the Upper *Galil*. In more recent times, R. Yechiel Michel Tuksinski (*Gesher Ha-Chaim* vol. I 27:10) notes the practice of taking soil specifically from *Har Ha-Zeitim*.

While *Chazal* extol the virtue of burial in *Eretz Yisrael*, the significance of using a small quantity of soil from *Eretz Yisrael* in a grave in *Chutz La-Aretz* is not readily apparent. The *gemara* in *Ketubot* (111a) indicates that those that are buried in *Eretz Yisrael* will be immediately resurrected at the time of *Techiyat Ha-Meitim*. The *gemara* initially entertains the position that those who are buried in *Chutz La-Aretz* will not be resurrected at all, but eventually concludes that their bones will roll all the way to *Eretz Yisrael*, and the *tzadikim* will benefit from protective tunnels for that purpose. Radvaz (*Teshuvot* 1:484) writes that bodies decompose more quickly in the soil of *Eretz Yisrael*, as indicated by the *pasuk* "*eretz ochelet yoshveha hi*" – "it is a land that consumes its inhabitants" (*Bemidbar* 13:32). As opposed to the negative implications intended by the *meragelim* who spoke these words, faster decomposition of a body is for the benefit of the deceased (see also *Divrei Sofrim* 363:16). However, neither the easing of tribulations associated with *Techiyat Ha-Meitim*, nor the more rapid decomposition of the body, would seem to be achieved by burial in *Chutz La-Aretz* with a minimal amount of earth from *Eretz Yisrael*.

R. Yechiel Michel Tuksinski (*Gesher Ha-Chaim* vol. 1 27:10) suggests that even if soil removed from *Eretz Yisrael* does not retain its *kedushah*, it still has a connection to *Eretz Yisrael*. That connection, either because of its inherent status, or because of its symbolic meaning, may still serve the purpose of easing the tribulations of *Techiyat Ha-Meitim*. *Shulchan Gavo'ah* (*ibid.*, 363:11) writes that burial in *Chutz La-Aretz* with a small amount of soil from *Eretz Yisrael* simply demonstrates *chibat ha-aretz*, love of the land.

This argument notwithstanding, R. Tuksinski concedes that the value of burying with earth from *Eretz Yisrael* is more readily understood if that soil retains the *kedushah* of *Eretz Yisrael*. The *gemara* in *Ketubot* (111a, cited in Shach, *Yoreh De'ah* 163:3, see also *Tanchuma Ha'azinu* 6) states that one who is buried in *Eretz Yisrael* is considered as if he is buried under the *mizbeach*, in fulfillment of the verse, "*ve-khiper admato amo*" (*Devarim* 32:43) – namely, that the land assists us in achieving

⁵. *Mikdash David* suggests that his approach also answers a classic question. The *mishnayot* in the beginning of *Keilim* (1:6–9) list ten levels of sanctity beginning with the entirety of *Eretz Yisrael* and culminating in the *Kodesh Ha-Kodashim*. In assessing the sanctity of *Eretz Yisrael* vis-à-vis all other lands, the *mishnah* notes that the *korban omer*, *bikkurim*, and the *shetei ha-lechem* brought on *Shavuot* can only be brought from produce grown in *Eretz Yisrael*. However, the *mishnah* notably omits the seemingly more obvious obligations of *terumot*, *ma'asrot*, and *shemittah* that are unique to *Eretz Yisrael*. According to *Mikdash David's* approach, the *mishnah* understandably does not include these *mitzvot* because they are not dependent on the location of *Eretz Yisrael* per se. If, in theory, ground from *Eretz Yisrael* would be transferred to foreign territory, that ground would also be obligated in *terumot*, *ma'asrot*, and *shemittah*.

⁶. In support of this custom, *Ohr Zarua* and *Hagahot Maymoniyot* (*Melakhim* 5:4) point to a practice recorded in the *Talmud Yerushalmi* (*Ketubot* 12:3) and *Tanchuma Vayechi* that coffins would be brought from *Chutz La-Aretz* to *Eretz Yisrael* for burial, and prior to their internment, a clod of earth would be placed on the coffin in fulfillment of the verse, "*ve-khiper admato amo*" – "and His land will serve as an atonement for His people" (*Devarim* 32:43). *Hagahot Maymoniyot* does note, however, that this source only serves as a precedent for burying with soil from *Eretz Yisrael* in *Eretz Yisrael* proper, and does not indicate any value in exporting the soil. See also *Peirushei Ha-Torah* of R. Chaim Paltiel, a younger contemporary of the Maharam of Rottenberg, who also acknowledges this custom and the somewhat dubious source. R. Avraham Malkho (*Shulchan Gavo'ah* *Yoreh De'ah* 163:10) observes further that if the placement of exported earth in a coffin in *Chutz La-Aretz* accomplishes the same thing as actual burial in *Eretz Yisrael*, *Yaakov Avinu* would have had less reason to insist on his burial in *Eretz Yisrael* proper.

atonement. *Sedei Chemed* (vol. 5 *Ma'arekhet Eretz Yisrael* 1:8) writes that this goal can be achieved with a minimal amount of earth, and even if the earth is exported to *Chutz La-Aretz*. Similarly, *Shulchan Gavvo'ah* writes that if one uses a significant amount of soil from *Eretz Yisrael*, covering the whole body, that may achieve the objective of speeding up the body's decomposition.

The *Ba'al Ha-Turim* (*Shemot* 28:7, ad loc.) writes that as a reward for Na'aman's request of soil from *Eretz Yisrael* he merited descendants who learned Torah. Our analysis of his petition demonstrates that the request itself touches on halakhic issues that contribute to our own *talmud Torah*.