



DIVREI MENACHEM

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Unsteady Steps to the Holy Land

Parshat Mase'ei describes Bnei Yisrael's journeys before entering the Land – which brings us to the perennial question as to why so few Diaspora Jews today are making aliyah. Let us put aside arguments related to family commitments, work constraints, and health reasons. What about the rest or, at least, those professing to be orthodox and practicing Jews?

So, people do not want to leave their comfort zones. They might add that because of the gross levels of assimilation in the Diaspora, they must stay behind and save Jewry from itself. Or they protest: “Who will lobby for Israel, if not us, loyal Jews in the Golah?” Some might even add that Israel broke her oaths not to go up [to the Land] and not to rebel against the nations of the world, “so how can I be part of that?”¹

We shall not enter into polemics but suffice it to say that our Parsha is very precise in adjuring us to “drive out [VEHO-RASHTEM] the inhabitants of the land and dwell therein – for unto you have I given this land to possess it” (Bemidbar 33: 50-53).

1 cf. *Ketubot* 111a and Wikipedia article, “The Three Oaths,” for a comprehensive discussion of this issue.

How will our Diaspora friends relate to that divine command, which the Ramban incorporated into the 613 mitzvot?

How will those in the Galut interpret the Talmudic statement that those who dwell outside of Eretz Yisrael can be considered as having no God (ibid, 110b)? How do they reconcile living outside of Israel when, clearly, they can fulfill the Mitzvot more totally in Israel?

How do Jewish Diaspora residents interpret the first “Rashi” in the Torah that reports how we should respond to the nations when they claim we stole the Land? – For we are to tell the nations how Hashem granted the territory to seven peoples and later apportioned Eretz Yisrael to His Chosen people. Even the skeptical “spies” sent by Moshe were instructed: “Go – and possess it!” (Devarim 1:21).

So, wherever we find ourselves, let us recall the Song of the Sea in which we declare:

“In Your kindness, You guided these people whom You redeemed/

You led [us] with Your might to Your holy abode.” (Shemot 15:17)

Finally, let us mean what we say when we recite daily: “Blessed are You, Hashem, who ingathers the dispersed of His people, Israel.” ■

Shabbat Shalom!

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