



RABBI AARON

Editor, Torah Tidbits

GOLDSCHIEDER

Chibat Ha'aretz: Loving the Land

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik shared the following in his eulogy for Rabbi Zev Gold, who was a leading figure in the Religious Zionist movement and one of the signatories of the Israeli Declaration of Independence.

“I will never forget the evening in 5695 [1935] when I visited Rabbi [Zev] Gold in Ramat Gan in Eretz Yisrael. He took me out to the orange groves near his house. It was a beautiful night, the sky was a perfect blue and there were endless stars. The bright moon of Eretz Yisrael shone all over the enchanted beauty, from afar we could see the lights of the all-Jewish city of Tel Aviv glistening in the dark. The lights were telling us the thrilling and intoxicating news of the rebuilding of the Holy Land. Overwhelmed with emotion, Rabbi Gold gazed toward the horizon and then turned to me and said: “Whoever does not feel the presence of God in Eretz Yisrael on this beautiful night while looking at the magnificent moon and at these beckoning stars, breathing the clear and pure air filled with

fragrance of blossoming growth, and above all when looking at the glistening lights of the city that was built entirely by Jews, is simply blind.”

Rabbi Gold continued, “Rav Yehudah HaLevi [1075-1141] was right when he said that prophecy flows unhindered in Eretz Yisrael and we need only a proper vessel to receive its message” [Kuzari 2:8-11].

As we stood there, Rabbi Gold picked up a small pebble and kissed it, to fulfill Rav Abba’s dictum in the Talmud that he would kiss the rocks of Akko [Ketuvot 112a]. That night, I thought to myself how insignificant I was compared to this special Jew who was able to experience the glory of God through the grandeur of the landscape of the Land of Israel” (The Rav, Vol. 2, Rakeffet, p. 118).

Not only is the custom of kissing the stones of Eretz Yisrael mentioned in the Talmud but the Rambam in his halachic code states this loving practice: “The great Sages would kiss the borders of Eretz Yisrael, kiss its’ stones and roll in its dust” (*Hilchot Melachim* 5:10).

Perhaps we can trace this deep desire to the Torah’s indelible account of Avraham’s departure from his home, “*To the Land that I will show you*” (*Beresheit* 11:1). The commentators wonder if Avraham knew from the outset where his final destination would be. Did God reveal to him his final destination?

The classic comrader of the Ibn Ezra

answered in the affirmative. “To the Land that I will show you “ (11:1) is followed by the verse which states, “And they went forth to go to the land of Canaan” (11:5). Evidently God directed him to the Land.

Rashi suggests that when Avraham first set out on the journey, he was unaware of the place God had in mind. “God did not reveal to him the Land immediately in order to make it beloved in his [Avraham’s] eyes...” (Rashi 12:1)

Rabbi Soloveitchik was drawn to the unique approach of the Ramban. After departing for an unknown location Avraham wandered from one place to another. He explored many countries. He wondered if he had found the place that God had intended or not.

The Ramban states (Gen.12:1), [Avraham] wandered from nation to nation, until he came to the land of Canaan, where He [God] said to him: “To your seed I give this Land.” Only once Avraham discovered the Land for himself did God confirm with him that he had correctly identified the Land.

What is the significance of Avraham locating the site of sanctity? The Rav suggested that this notion contains a foundational principle for us as Jews. “The Almighty has implanted in the Jew a sensitivity to *kedusha*, to the holy.” In other words, the Jew naturally yearns for holiness and seeks to uncover and recognize it even when on the surface it is not apparent. This idea of Avraham discovering the place of holiness also is suggestive of the idea that knowledge of God is not something purely theoretical and intellectual but is passionate and perceptible (*Abraham’s Journey* pp. 60-61). ■



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