



## FROM THE DESK OF RABBI MOSHE HAUER

OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

**ORTHODOX  
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# Yearning

Even if you can't have it, you should still want it.

That may sound like the opposite of the tenth commandment, *lo tachmod*, that warns against desiring or coveting that which belongs to others. *Lo tachmod*, however, applies to things that are not meant for us. That which ought to be ours we must covet and desire and never stop yearning for. In fact, we use the descriptive of 'desire'

positively regarding *Eretz Yisrael*, referring to it as *Eretz Chemdah*.

This can help us understand something very puzzling.

In the opening of our Parsha, Moshe pleads with Hashem to be allowed to cross over the Jordan and see *Eretz Yisrael*. While his plea to enter the land is rejected, Hashem instructs him to climb to a vantage point from which he will be able to see the land from a distance. What would be accomplished by seeing the land, especially when we consider the Talmud's understanding (Sotah 14a) of what Moshe really wanted?

*"Rabbi Simlai taught: For what reason did Moshe our teacher greatly desire to enter Eretz Yisrael? Did he need to eat its produce or satisfy himself from its goodness? Rather, this is what Moshe said: Many mitzvot were commanded to the Jewish people, and some of them can be fulfilled only in Eretz Yisrael, so I will enter the land in order that they can all be fulfilled by me."*

Which *mitzvot* would Moshe fulfill by seeing the land from a distance? Here we may again invert the usually negative pathway of desire. When the Torah (Bamidbar 15:39) warns us against straying after our heart and our eyes, our Sages (see Rashi there) explain the sequence of sin: "The eye sees, the heart desires, and the body acts." In much the same way, Moshe was told to climb the mountain so that his eyes' seeing the land would grow his heart's desire for

## In Loving Memory



**Max Weil**

משה מנחם וייל

whose 6th yahrzeit falls on י"ב מנחם אב  
He is very much missed by his children,  
grandchildren, great grandchildren,  
relatives and friends

Link to a video visiting the Sinai kollel in 2009 with Max Weil, the founder of the kollel



its *mitzvot*, and while his body would not be allowed to follow through and act upon it, the desire itself matters. This understanding is implicit in the continuation of that Talmudic passage and its reading of Hashem's actual response to Moshe:

*"The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to him: Do you seek to enter the land to perform these mitzvot for any reason other than to benefit? I will grant you credit as if you had performed them."*

Gazing at the land and the resultant desire for it and its *mitzvot* would itself generate the benefit of the *mitzvot*, as the Talmud teaches elsewhere (Kiddushin 40a):

*The Holy One, Blessed be He, links a good thought to an action... Rav Asi said: Even if a person intended to perform a mitzva but due to circumstances beyond his control he did not perform it, the verse ascribes him credit as if he performed the mitzva.*

We are defined by what we yearn for. When we are preoccupied with material desires for things that we are not meant to have, we miss out on what our lives are supposed to be. When we instead yearn for higher and greater things, that becomes who we are.

This understanding helps us see why every Shabbat Nachamu we read this story of Hashem's rejection of Moshe's pleas to enter the land. Moshe was not rejected; he was redirected to nurture his desire for the land that he could not then have. That is what we must do as well. Lacking the *Beit Hamikdash*, we can nevertheless connect to it by gazing at it and yearning for it, just as our Sages (Ta'anis 30b) taught, "One who mourns over Yerushalayim merits and sees its joy." ■

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