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RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

MAGGID SHIUR ALL PARSHA AND ALL DAF, OU.ORG

Why Israel? Three Powerful Incentives

As Moshe delivers his farewell address, he recalls the triumphs and failures of the past forty years. Before revisiting the catalog of mitzvot from the earlier books, he awakens our yearning for Israel—the Land of our dreams. Forty years earlier, in the shadow of Egyptian bondage, he had described Israel to weary slaves as a land flowing with milk and honey. Now, standing on the brink of entering the Land, Moshe offers a richer, more vivid picture. He reveals the many blessings and lasting beauty of life in Israel, giving us a glimpse of its vibrant spirit and showing why living there is such a special privilege. His portraits of life in Israel reveal the profound privilege we hold in living in this Land.

THE PROMISE OF PLENTY

His first portrait of the benefits of life in Israel centers on the material blessings

of this Land. Moshe reminds us of the arduous march through the searing desert, when we were hungry, weary, and scorched by the sun. Through divine miracles, we were sustained with constant food, and even our garments did not wrinkle or fade under the relentless desert heat. Yet, despite these daily wonders, it was a harsh and spartan existence. Life in Israel, Moshe promises, will be utterly different. It is a Land laced with rivers, with underground streams coursing through its mountains and valleys. It is a Land brimming with fruits and grain, a land in which nothing is lacking. Beyond its food and water, its mountains yield iron and copper, enriching the nation with valuable resources. Moshe draws us toward a vision of a Land that will provide not only sustenance but also material abundance and even luxury. In Hashem's ideal design, luxury in Israel is not a mark of hedonism or moral decay; rather, life there is meant to be comfortable. When the strain and struggle for survival are eased, the human spirit is free to pursue higher callings and spiritual ambitions.

ECONOMIC RENEWAL

Throughout much of our history, we have lived under financial strain—especially

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in exile, where we were often socially and economically marginalized. Even in our own Land, when we turned away from Hashem, our prosperity diminished. Yet the ideal remains: to dwell under His gaze, enjoying the blessing of material well-being while living a life of spiritual purpose. In the early years of the modern State of Israel, economic conditions were harsh—so severe that many Jews chose to emigrate, unable to bear the financial hardships of life. Over the past several decades, however, the situation has transformed dramatically, and Israel has risen to become a global economic powerhouse. This progress is part of the redemptive process—a realization of Moshe Rabbeinu’s vision of an abundant and comfortable life in the Land of Israel. Hopefully, we will learn how to steward this comfort and prosperity wisely.

IRON, COPPER, AND INNOVATION

Financial comfort in Israel matters not only because it frees us to pursue higher goals but also because it empowers us to improve our world. The minerals Moshe highlights—iron and copper—are practical and essential, unlike gold or silver. Gold and silver often serve as symbols of vanity or as means to amass personal wealth. By contrast, copper and iron are practical metals, vital for building and sustaining society. In the ancient world, iron was forged into tools, farming equipment, and weapons for defense, while copper was used for cookware, water vessels, and house furnishings. These materials enabled construction, agriculture, and craftsmanship—the infrastructure of daily life. Life in Israel, as Moshe envisions it, does not treat luxury as a goal unto itself. Instead, the abundance anticipated will liberate us from



the relentless struggle for survival. Freed from that burden, we are able not only to pursue higher spiritual callings but also to elevate the human condition—building a society that is more stable, secure, and comfortable.

As Israel’s financial standing has strengthened, it has also emerged as a technological powerhouse, pioneering advances in medicine, energy, agriculture, and science. We have harnessed the iron and copper resources hidden within this Land to build a better world.

Moshe’s vision of a life of abundance in Israel is beginning to take shape in our modern return to the Land.

THE HEARTBEAT OF ISRAEL’S MITZVAH

While describing the agricultural abundance of Israel, Moshe Rabbeinu focuses on the seven specific species for which the Land is praised—the sheva minim, shen-ishtabcha Eretz Yisrael: wheat, barley, grapes, pomegranates, figs, olives, and honey (date honey). By listing these fruits and grains, Moshe is not merely offering a menu of Israel’s delicacies; he is hinting at a mitzvah that can only be fulfilled in Israel and only with these species—the mitzvah of Bikkurim. This list, with its allusion to the mitzvah of Bikkurim, underscores an entirely different reason to yearn for the Land of Israel: the

opportunity to perform mitzvot unique to it. Moshe himself thirsted for entry into the Land, longing to fulfill commandments unavailable to him in the wilderness. His yearning was so intense that, even knowing he would not cross the Jordan, he designated three cities of refuge on the eastern bank—cities that would not take effect until the rest of the Land was conquered without him. It is a poignant and bittersweet moment: Moshe initiating a taste of the one mitzvah tied to the Land of Israel that he himself would experience. By mentioning the list of Bikkurim, Moshe underscores the expanded opportunity to fulfill mitzvot as an additional compelling incentive to live in Israel.

A HALACHIC BLUEPRINT

This list is more than a catalogue of bikkurim-worthy produce—it points to a larger truth that positions Israel as a center of mitzvah observance. The Gemara in Sukkah (5b-6a) draws from the list of sheva minim to derive various shiurim of halacha. For example, the olive defines the size of a kezayit, the halachic minimum for eating, while the barley grain serves as the measure for determining when a human bone conveys tumah. Ultimately, the Gemara concludes that these precise measures were given to Moshe at Sinai as a halacha le-Moshe mi-Sinai, and that the list itself functions primarily as a mnemonic device. Yet as a mnemonic, this list of Israeli fruits alludes to the broader system of halachic observance, reminding us that life in the Land of Israel is halacha in full motion and full expression. Although these measures apply to mitzvot outside of Israel as well, Israeli produce serves as the model and template for halachic shiurim. This underscores that Israel—with

its fruits—is the unique setting where halacha can be lived to its fullest.

We have yet to witness the construction of the Mikdash and the full restoration of halachot, yet our return to the Land has already expanded the scope of mitzvot available to us. Moshe's second incentive for life in Israel is also gradually unfolding: the broadened halachic opportunities that the Land uniquely affords.

THE GIFT OF UNCERTAINTY

Having emphasized Israel's abundance and its unique halachic opportunities, Moshe Rabbeinu—later in Parshat Eikev—shifts focus. He presents a completely different reason to live in the Land of Israel. Ironically, this reason is not rooted in abundance, but in the scarcity of one crucial resource: rain-water. All the produce, grain, and underground springs of Israel ultimately depend on rainfall. And rainfall in Israel is never constant, never guaranteed. In highlighting this element, Moshe does not contrast Israel with the desert, as he did earlier when describing Israel's potential bounty. Instead, he contrasts life in Israel with the conditions of Egypt. Egypt's conditions were harsh—marked by slavery, persecution, and cruelty—but food was plentiful, a rare advantage in the ancient world where securing nourishment was a constant struggle. Positioned along the fertile Nile Delta, Egypt enjoyed a steady and predictable supply of fresh water. The river not only irrigated its fields but also provided fish, an essential source of protein. Moshe cautions us not to expect the same certainty in Israel. All its agricultural promise depends on adequate rainfall—a resource never assured in the arid lands of the Middle

East. This dependence on rain fosters a continual reliance on Hashem. It is a Land that demands His direct and constant attention, “from the beginning of the year until the end of the year”:

אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ דֹרֵשׁ אוֹתָהּ תָּמִיד, מֵרֵאשִׁית
הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרִית הַשָּׁנָה

Because of the uncertainty of rainfall, the greatest blessing of living in Israel is precisely this: the constant, palpable presence of Hashem—a gift unparalleled anywhere else. This is a very different incentive for living in Israel—not the opportunity to fulfill more mitzvot, but the chance to live more directly in the presence of Hashem. The conditions for this constant closeness are demanding and challenging. Life will be more uncertain and less steady. We will not have a constant stream of fresh water but must rely on seasonal rainfall. Yet it is precisely this delicate dependency that binds us closer to Hashem, offering a more immediate, day-to-day experience of living continually in His presence.

EVER-PRESENT GUARDIAN

For thousands of years, we were wholly dependent on rainfall, living the literal meaning of the pasuk. However, recent advances in agricultural technology and water desalination have relieved much of this dependence on natural rainfall. We still remain dependent—several years of drought can still inflict serious damage on Israel’s ecosystems and natural aquifers. In a broader perspective, the acute awareness of living in constant need and presence of Hashem, driven by reliance on rainfall, has somewhat subsided—at least for the time being.

In modern Israel, however, a different factor creates an unstable reality—and with it, a deeper dependence on Hashem. The

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ongoing opposition and hostility directed at our people make life unpredictable and fragile, compelling us to turn to Hashem for help and, through that, to experience His presence more profoundly. Facing such intense adversity, we require Hashem’s constant attention—literally from the beginning of the year until its end. The privilege of living in a Land where Hashem’s watchful care is ever-present surpasses any material benefit or even the expanded halachic opportunities. Ultimately, this closeness—being continually in the presence of Hashem and His divine providence—is the greatest incentive to live in Israel.

Life in Israel will always be precarious—whether due to scarce rainfall or external threats. Yet the blessing within this reality is a sharpened awareness of living in Hashem’s presence and a heartfelt reliance upon Him. ■



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