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Inheriting Avraham’s Love of the Land Rav Kook on Pirkei Avot 5:4

“Our forefather Avraham was tested with ten trials and passed all of them, to show the extent of the love of Avraham our forefather.” (Avot 5:4)

Rav Chaim Volozhin raised the following question regarding the above mishnah: Why does this mishnah refer to Avraham as our forefather, (*Avarham Avinu*) whereas the previous mishnah did not use this title? Rav Chaim Volozhin answers that it is because this mishnah speaks specifically about the trials and tests that Avraham was able to overcome in his lifetime. Once he succeeded in each test he bequeathed the trait that he mastered to his children. Avraham serves as *avinu*, our forefather, in the sense that every Jew has inherited certain outstanding

spiritual qualities merely being a descendant of this giant of faith and lover of Hashem. (*Ruach Chaim*, Avot 5:4).

Rav Chaim Volozhin says that the trait of sacrifice is embedded within the soul of the Jew. In particular, he cites as an example of the willingness of Jew to move to the Land of Israel: “Our willingness to leave behind family and friends and move to the Holy Land is derived from *Lech Lecha* (“Go from your Land, from your relatives, and from your fathers’s house to the Land that I will show you [*Bereshit* 12:1]), Avraham’s trial of leaving home and moving to the Holy Land.” (Ibid.)

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook prominently features the notion of Eretz Yisrael being essential to the Jew’s very nature and to the soul. In a well-known passage from his classic work *Orot* Rav Kook writes:

“It is impossible for a Jew to be faithful to his thoughts and visions outside of the Land in the same way that he is faithful in the Land of Israel. Manifestations of holiness, of whatever level, tend to be pure in the Land, and outside of the Land mixed with dross.” (*Orot*, piska #4, translation Naor, Orot, p.91)

Rav Kook posits that a Jew brings to light his or her most authentic self when residing

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in the Land of Israel. The holy air of the Land is most suited to enhance and help develop a Jew's spiritual talents and character traits.

The Talmud at the end of *Masechet Ketubot* (112a) shares a number of inspirational vignettes which highlight the love of the sages for the Land of Israel. One of the sages, Rebbe Abba would kiss the stones of Akko as he came to shore of Israel from his ship. Rebbe Chiya would go beyond this expression of love for the Land by actually rolling in the dust of Eretz Yisrael. He maintained this practice based on the verse: "For your servants have cherished her stones and favored her dust." (*Tehillim* 102:14).

Rashi, commenting on this vignette, simply cites the verse without further explanation. This seems odd. Why does Rashi choose to repeat the verse without adding any comment or original insight?

Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop, the eminent friend of Rav Kook offered an exhilarating explanation. He says that Rashi's intent was to quote the verse and to leave out one word: *sh'ne'amar*, "as it says." According to Rashi, Rebbe Chiya rolled in the dust of Eretz Yisrael because he was naturally drawn to feel the holy soil on his skin. He did so not because "*sh'ne'amar*," because he was compelled by the command found in the verse, but rather because of a burning love of the Land embedded in his heart and soul. (*Shirat Hayam*, Yair Charlop, p. 164).

Rav Kook brought this talmudic teaching to life in a unique way. Once, Rav Kook was on his way to Tel Aviv with a group of

rabbis. The car developed engine trouble and they were forced to pull over and stop for a while. While the other rabbis waited on the side of the road, Rav Kook seemed to have disappeared.

After a while, the rabbis decided to search for him. They found him a short distance away, completely outstretched on the ground whispering the words, "My Land! My Land! O' holy soil of Eretz Yisrael!" When he rose to

his feet, he said to the rabbis who had gathered around him, "When else do I have an opportunity to speak with our Motherland who longs for her children to return to her borders?" (An Angel Among Men, Raz, translated by Lichtman, p. 273)

Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlop would often speak of the merit he was blessed with to have been born in Israel and to have never left

its borders. In the introduction to his book *Beit Z'vul* he wrote: "God has helped me that I have never left the boundaries of Eretz Yisrael, and that I have never tasted of the air or the physicality of foreign countries." (Quoted in *Shirat Hayam*, Yair Charlop, p. 166)



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A story is told of Rav Kook and Rav Charlop on their return trip from their well-known visit in 1914, together with other eminent rabbis, to the new settlement in northern Israel. They traveled back together by boat from the port in Haifa to Jaffa. A storm broke out during the journey and the boat was being tossed about in the sea. The rabbis on board appropriately began to recite *Tehillim*. Unexpectedly, Rav Kook responded quite differently. He stood up and began to chant the talmudic dictum: *Shluhei mitzvah eino nizokin* - "Messengers fulfilling a mitzvah are not harmed". When Rav Charlop saw this he immediately stood up from his place and joined his master. Together they chanted these words with deep faith and emotion.

After a few minutes the waves began to subside. The rabbis on the boat gathered around Rav Kook and Rav Charlop and expressed their astonishment. How could it be that Rav Kook had brought about this sudden change? Rav Kook pointed to his beloved friend, Rav Charlop and said: "It was the merit of Rav Charlop never leaving the Holy Land and never once stepping foot on foreign soil, which served to affect salvation for all of us." (Ibid., p. 183-184) ■



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