



REBBETZIN SHIRA SMILES

FACULTY, OU ISRAEL CENTER

Laudable Land

Parashat Behar concludes with the declaration, “Ani Hashem Elokeichem asher hotzaiti etchem mei’eretz Mitzrayim lateit lachem et eretz Cana’an le’hiyot lachem l’Elokim — I am Hashem, your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be a God to you.” (*Vayikra* 25:38)

Rashi links bringing *Am Yisrael* to the land with being their God, “**To be a God to you;** for I am a God to anyone who lives in the land of Israel, but anyone who leaves it [without halachic permission] is like one who worships idols.” (*Ketubot* 110b) How do we understand this statement? Is Hashem not found in the entire world?

The *Pnei Yehoshua* offers a fascinating insight into this Gemara. The land of Israel is described as a land where, “the eyes of Hashem are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.” (*Devarim* 11:12) There is an intense level of *hashgachah*, a distinct kind of Divine attention and clarity felt by those who live in the land of Israel, inspiring them with a heightened awareness of Hashem’s presence. However, those who live outside the land do not share this reality; their perception of the Divine tends to be more obscure and vague.

The Ramban in *parashat Acharei Mot*

discusses the uniqueness of Eretz Yisrael in that it is not governed by any heavenly force, nor does it have a ministering angel who guards it. Indeed, as the *Siftei Chayim* points out, the level of *hashgachah* in Eretz Yisrael is so profound that Hashem judges the land every day. It seems as though Hashem is hyper— focused on the land, and the rest of the world lies in the periphery. The *Siftei Chayim* quotes the *Ricanti* who describes Eretz Yisrael as a land that completely relies on the rain from Above for nourishment, unlike Egypt, who waters the land with their ‘feet’ like a vegetable garden. As the foot is the limb most distant from the heart and head, this reflects how Hashem provides sustenance to the lands outside of Israel from a distance. Eretz Yisrael, closest to the Divine presence, completely depends on Hashem’s grace and goodness. It is no wonder that the Ran notes that one’s *tefillah* in Eretz Yisrael has greater power; the connection is elemental.

Rav Scheinerman in *Ohel Moshe* observes a wonderful nuance in *Birkat Hamazon* that reflects the contrast between living in Eretz Yisrael and living in *chutz la’aretz*. The first blessing of *Birkat Hamazon* was composed in the desert by Moshe Rabbeinu and is written in the third person, “*hu noten lechem lechol basar ... u’ve’tuvo hagadol* — He gives nourishment to all flesh...and through His great goodness...” The second blessing, written by Yehoshua upon entering the land, switches to the second person, “*Nodeh*

le'cha — We give thanks to You.” The third blessing, written by Shlomo Hamelech in Eretz Yisrael, continues in the second person, “*Rachem na Hashem Elokeinu al Yisrael amecha ve'al Yerushalyim irecha* — Have mercy, Hashem, on Israel Your people, on Jerusalem Your city...”

Clearly, there is an intimate dynamic at play between Hashem and His people residing in His land that cannot be replicated anywhere else in the world. ■

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