

## **BALAK 5770**

### **Rabbi Aharon Ziegler**

My message is from the words of Bil'am, (24:5) "*Ma Tovu O'halecha Ya'akov, Mish'kenotecha Yisrael*" [How goodly are your tents, Ya'akov, your dwelling places, Israel]. The beauty of these words is magnificently interpreted by the Malbim (Rabbi Meir Leib Yechiel Mechel, 1809-1879).

The Malbim suggests that an "*ohel*" represents a temporary tent, while a "*Mishkan*" symbolizes a permanent dwelling. In the desert, the Jews dwelled in tents, but at this point they were prepared to enter the Land and dwell in permanent homes. Bil'am saw all of this, he saw both perspectives and said, "How goodly are your tents, Yaakov", referring to the tents of the desert. Then he said, "How goodly are your dwelling places, Israel", in referring to the fact that they will soon be privileged to dwell in permanent homes in Eretz Yisrael. The name Yisrael is greater than the name Ya'akov. This teaches that when people enter the Land they will be on a higher level and will be worthy of being called Yisrael (Israel).

This is Halachically true as well. When one rents an apartment in Chutz La'Aretz he is exempt from the Mitzvah of Mezuzah for the first thirty days, whereas if he rents an apartment in Eretz Yisrael he is required to place the Mezuzot immediately (Yoreh Dei'ah 286: 22). The difference is, that in Chutz La'Aretz one must always feel a sense of being in a state of temporary and transience. As the Ba'al Ha'ggadah states: "*Vayagar Shom*"- "*Melamed sheh'lo yarad Ya'akov Avinu le'hish'takei'a B'Mitzrayim, elah lagur shom*". For Ya'akov Avinu the move to Mitzrayim was never meant to be a permanent place of dwelling but only a temporary transition. Yehudah HaLevi expressed this same sentiment when he said "*Ani b'ma'arov aval liby b'mirzach*"- [I am physically in the west (chutz laAretz) but my heart is in the East (Eretz Yisrael)].

The message is obvious: the Land of Israel is our only true and permanent dwelling place. All other places are just way stations on our journey back home. All Jewish communities outside the Land eventually wither away. What is left (Jewishly) of places like Pumbedita, Spain, Worms, Warsaw, Lublin, Yemen, Morocco, Newark, Harlem, Brownsville (the list goes on)? Eretz Yisrael, in contrast, has always and will always be a central part of our national conscience. Even during years of exile, we never lost sight of where we truly belong. Bil'am saw it, Bil'am understood it.

May we soon see the fulfillment of Chazal's statement, "All the synagogues, (and shtiblech), and study halls of Bavel (Babylonia) will eventually be transported to Eretz Yisrael" (Megillah 29a).