

Eretz Yisroel, the Legacy of Avraham Avinu by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

In Bereishis 12:1 we are told about Avraham's Command from Hashem to leave his family, household and all that he has ever known to go to the land which he will be shown. Rashi tells us that Avraham was not told immediately which land to go to in order to make the land more special in his eyes and to give him a reward for following blindly every word of Hashem. Avraham is repeatedly told in this parsha that Eretz Yisroel is a distinguishing gift for him and his children.

We see from the very beginning that Eretz Yisroel is very special and especially reserved for Avraham and his descendants. We also see from the Torah's emphasis on Avraham being in Eretz Yisroel that he and his descendants only reach their full potential in Eretz Yisroel. This is true to the extent that later in the parsha, [Bereishis 17:7]. Rashi quotes the Gemara in Kesubos 110 that only in Eretz Yisroel Hashem is our G-d and one who lives outside of Eretz Yisroel is living with out a g-d. The Gur Aryeh on Rashi explains that while Hashem is truly everywhere, nevertheless, his direct supervision is manifested much more in Eretz Yisroel.

Given the above, we can understand why our exile is considered to be such a punishment for us and is indeed the final punishment in both of the *tochachas* in the Torah. Yet, the following question presents itself. If the nation of Yisroel, was really meant to be an *Ohr Lagoyim*, a light unto the nations, then why do they need a land of their own? Would it not be better if they had no land of their own and would have no choice but to live in lands of other nations and in this way the entire world would see Hashem's ways? If the ideal scenario is all of Am Yisroel living in Eretz Yisroel, then only those who go to Eretz Yisroel are the likely ones to have contact with the nation of Yisroel.

The above issue is addressed by Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, Zt"l in his writings. He explains that Am Yisroel needs Eretz Yisroel as a home or a base. When Am Yisroel lives in Eretz Yisroel and follows the Torah properly and is also *B'achdus*, unified in purpose, then Eretz Yisroel becomes the 'satellite station' and broadcasts Hashem's message to the

world. Consequentially, we become the *Ohr Lagoyim*. In Eretz Yisroel a Jew is able to bring Hashem into the most mundane aspects of life. After all, every second, whether one is aware of it or not, is being spent in a place of holiness and every breath taken and every step walked is some aspect of a mitzvah. So when we are exiled, the special privilege of living in Eretz Yisroel is lost and we cease to be the *Ohr Lagoyim* and as a result our status in the eyes of the world as the Am Hashem goes down greatly. When Am Yisroel wanders outside of their land, they see the difference between themselves and the other nations firsthand and are induced to repent. Rav Kook explains that this means a national teshuvah taken on by the entire nation as a whole and not the individual teshuvah. This explains the opinion in the Gemara Brachos 24b and Shabbos 41a of Rav Yehuda who felt that going from Bavel to Eretz Yisroel was a violation of a command in Yirmiyahu. Some say it refers to the vessels of the Bais Hamikdash. Rav Kook explained that there was a specific need for Bavel, the largest Jewish Community at the time to be outside of Eretz Yisroel. There had to be a communal development of the need to do unify and do teshuvah outside of Eretz Yisroel. Only with such unification on a national level could we fully correct ourselves. In light of Rav Kook's philosophy the first verse in our parsha has been explained that Avraham was not told specifically which land to go to because at this juncture, what was most critical was that Avraham should have the land to develop within. Only later would it be revealed exactly which land this would be.

The Gemarah in Pesachim 87b tells us that Am Yisroel went into galus only to make converts. This suggests the opposite of all we have been saying till now in Rav Kook's name. However, this may be able to be reconciled the following way. The Sefer Taharas Kodosh by the Rebbe, Rav Aharon Roth, Zt'l, asks the following. Is it logical that Am Yisroel went into galus and suffered so horribly and with such intensity only to make more converts? He explains that the Gemara means to say that sins in Eretz Yisroel caused sparks of kedusha to fly outside of Eretz Yisroel and required Am Yisroel to go to these places and pick them up again. We see from his words, however, that exile was in fact a punishment for sins committed in Eretz Yisroel. Had we behaved properly in Eretz Yisroel, we would have been the proper medium to bring kedusha into the world and the need for our galus would never have arisen.

We see from all of the above the centrality of Eretz Yisroel from the time of Avraham Avinu till the end of all generations. Not only do we have to be cognizant of its kedusha when we are there but we also have to be careful of how we speak of Eretz Yisroel. The Gemara at the end of Kesubos tells us how Rav Ami and Rav Asi would move benches from the sun to the shade in order not to complain about the climate of Eretz Yisroel. The same Gemara also tells us how Rav Chiya Bar Gamda would roll in the dust based on the verse in Tehillim 102:15 which reads of how its servants yearn for the dust and stones of the land. Indeed, this has been our yearning since we went into galus. Some never left at all and throughout our history, there always was at least some small number of Jewish people in Eretz Yisroel. No matter where the Jewish people were throughout the world, we could never forget our home. As we davened three times every day we made it a point to face our homeland Eretz Yisroel and Yerushalayim. This idea of facing home always added an extra dimension to our davening; as we davened to Hashem, we kept our thoughts of our real home in our hearts as well. May the merit of all of the Tefillos of Am Yisroel throughout the centuries make us worthy to see the shechina return to Eretz Yisroel and may Elokai Yisroel and Am Yisroel be restored to their proper places in the world order, thus realizing the legacy given to Avraham Avinu.