

Parashat Shalach Lecha

Trusting in Hashem's Protection "Under the Vine and Under the Fig-Tree"

Unravelling the West Bank Myth

Some people get uneasy when they find out that Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin is located in Gush Etzion. "Isn't that on the West Bank?" they ask nervously. I take a deep breath, while preparing myself to reveal the nature of this misnomer—a product of Arab propaganda. The transient term 'West Bank' supposedly refers to the western bank of the Jordan River. The definition of a riverbank is the slopes bordering a river. How wide is a riverbank? Perhaps 1 or 2 miles? Yet this term is used today to refer to a land 35 miles wide. Topographically, this land has a range of hills some 60 miles long. It is not a bank! (Sha'i ben-Tekoa, *Phantom Nation Inventing the "Palestinians" as the Obstacle to Peace* p 8). Shame on 'wikitravel' when it defines "the West Bank" as a "territory under Israeli occupation with areas of Palestinian Autonomous Control pockmarked with Israeli military/civilian settlements in the Middle East between Israel and Jordan, to the north of the Dead Sea. It forms the larger portion of the semi-autonomous Palestinian Territories (the smaller being the Gaza Strip)..." (http://wikitravel.org/en/West_Bank). If the Biblical Judea and Samaria has to be labeled 'territories' they are certainly not the occupied but rather the liberated territories! The other day, when completing the *Scroll of Ruth* with my students, we learned that this moving story took place in Beit-Lechem Yehuda – meaning the land of the tribe of Yehuda or Judea in English. Gush Etzion actually comprises the Biblical area of Judea where Naomi and Ruth returned to bring redemption to Israel (*Ruth* 1:7). "So," I told my students, "If you hear anyone calling our area 'West Bank' please correct them and insist on the proper term; Judea!" I was pleased when the face of one of my students from Europe immediately lit up as she exclaimed, "This term West Bank is constantly being screamed into my ear. Next time, I will know exactly how to respond!"

Fear of the Foe

When a Jew uses Arab propaganda terminology in regards to the Land of Israel, it stems from a fear-related inferiority complex that we don't deserve the Land of Israel. We still carry a millennia old childhood wound stemming from this week's parasha's sin of the Spies, who were afraid to conquer the land:

סַפֵּר בַּמִּדְבָּר פָּרַק יֵג (לֹא) וְהָאֲנָשִׁים אָשְׁרָ עָלָיו עָמוּ אָמְרוּ לֹא נוֹכַל לָעֲלוֹת אֶל הָעָם כִּי חֲזָק הוּא מִמֶּנּוּ:
 "But the men that went up with him said: 'We are not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we' (*Bamidbar* 13:31).

Rashi explains that the word מִמֶּנּוּ/mimenu – can also be pronounced מִמֶּנּוּ/mimeno – than Him, implying that they were afraid that the enemy was stronger than G-d. Excessive fear and lack of self-confidence derives from a lack of trust in G-d, who gives us the strength to carry out His will. Developing emunah that Hashem miraculously returned this land to us, helps us to overcome the fear of the Spies which today translates into fear of terrorism. We have to evolve from the bent-over Jewish self-hating grasshopper mentality of the Spies and learn to "walk upright in our Land." The Hebrew word for security – בִּיטָחוֹן/bitachon, is the same term that we use when we speak of trusting Hashem. We live in uncertain times. Regardless of location, security is simply an illusion –

Life Lessons from Rebbetzin's Heart

there are never any guarantees. The only real security we have in life is to trust in G-d's loving hand to protect us from harm, as every day we clearly experience His miracles.

Returning to the Land of Our Goal

This year, *Parasha Shelach Lecha* marks 24 years since my husband and I returned to Israel after having lived for four years in the US. Upon our return, we truly experienced how *Eretz Yisrael* is the only place where the Torah can be observed in all of its fullness. The mitzvot performed in the Diaspora are only for practice until we can return to Israel to observe them properly (Rashi, *Devarim* 11:18, Ramban, *Vayikra* 18:25). The following teaching by Rav Kook helped us to understand the essential importance of returning to the Land:

"Eretz Yisrael is not a peripheral matter, an external acquisition of the nation; it is not merely a means toward the goal of the general coalescing of the nation, nor of strengthening its material existence, nor even its spiritual" (Rav Kook, *Orot* 1).

Even many Torah observant Jews erroneously believe that the Land of Israel is merely a means rather than a goal, vital to our very existence. The Jewish people without the Land of Israel is a mere shadow of our inner potential. Our relationship with the Land of Israel is not based only on historical rights, or on the need for a homeland to bring our oppressed and scattered people together. The Land of Israel is not just a place where Jews can be safe after the holocaust. It is not merely a place of physical refuge for downtrodden Jews. Its purpose and justification is not a negative – to avoid or protect Jews from the enemy. Rather, this land – that Hashem granted to the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'acov – has its own positive and deep purpose which goes beyond serving as a means to attain spiritual heights or a place where we can do extra mitzvot. Our connection to the Land of Israel, like the connection of the soul to the body, transcends rational explanations. All the blessings which G-d sends to the world flow out of *Eretz Yisrael*: "The vitality of the entire world, with all of its blessings and Divine Influence –initially flow down to Tzion, and from there they are apportioned to everyone on earth" (Anaf Yosef, *Yoma* 54b). This blessing is only fully manifested when the Jewish nation is situated on its homeland. Concurrent with the spread of Jewish sovereignty over all parts of the Land of Israel, greater and greater Divine blessing flows into the world (Rambam, *The Guide* 1:8). The holiness of the land does not evolve from the mitzvot performed here. Rather, the special mitzvot pertaining only to the Land of Israel derive from the inherent holiness of the land. *המצוות התלויות בארץ/hamitzvot hat'lyot b'aretz* – The mitzvot depend on the land!

The Messianic Vision: Developing a Relationship with the Land

The ingathering of the exiles depends on the merit of keeping these mitzvot of the land. Therefore, planting fruit-trees in the land of Israel is an important part of the mitzvah to settle the land. Regarding the verse, "You shall possess it and you shall settle in it..." (*Devarim* 11:31), the Vilna Gaon explains that through planting the Land of Israel we will merit to possess it. (*Kol Hator* 1:9). Actually, the task of *Mashiach ben Yosef*, who precedes the final redemption, is to drive away the impure spirit from the Land by gathering in the exiles, rebuilding Jerusalem, and planting and cultivating the desolate areas (*Kol Hator* 2:117). We fulfill the mitzvah of possessing the land (*Bamidbar* 33:53), through building and planting" (*Kol Hator* 1:9).

The Sin of the Spies Repeated in Our Time

The Torah was not given to be lived in the wilderness of Sinai, but in the hills and valleys of *Eretz Yisrael*. In desiring to keep only the spiritual side of Torah, and not its holy, earthly component, the Spies brought about the death of their entire generation. The lack of faith they displayed in rebelling against the commandment to settle in the Promised Land, reverberates through the annals of Jewish history. Any Jewish outlook that undermines our connection to *Eretz Yisrael* is destined to fail, because the Judaism of exile is by its very nature, temporary. The only way to truly strengthen Judaism in the Diaspora is to strengthen its connection to the Land of Israel, by linking Diaspora Judaism to the source of Divine Jewish life and holiness in *Eretz Yisrael*. No matter how pleasant certain exiles may seem, Jewish life outside of Israel is an abnormal situation, and unhealthy Judaism. "One should always live in *Eretz Yisrael*; even in a city where the majority consists of gentiles. He shouldn't live outside Israel even in a city where the majority consists of Jews. For whoever lives outside of Israel is compared to someone who worships idols" (Rambam, *Laws of Kings* Chapter 5), (Based on *Ketubot* 110b). The strengthening of Torah learning in exile does not minimize the need to be in the Land of Israel, as in the future the synagogues and study halls of Babylon will be reestablished in *Eretz Yisrael* (*Babylonian Talmud, Megillah* 29a).

"Someone who builds a big stone house unnecessarily in the Diaspora, in order to have more space, is considered as despairing of the coming redemption. His building becomes a danger rather than a protection for him (Chatam Sofer, *Yore Deah* 138). The final Redemption from Egypt was engendered by the courage of Nachshon ben Aminadav when he stepped into the Reed Sea, which only parted when it reached his neck. We are fortunate to be living on the edge of redemption. To undo the sin of the Spies, we need to show courage and trust that Hashem has given us this entire land to live in, and that when we trust in Him, He will protect us. The Spies who made the Israelites lose hope, brought back from Israel the very same fruits of the land through which Hashem will grant us His ultimate protection. As the prophet proclaims: "But they shall dwell every man under his vine and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of Hashem of hosts has spoken" (*Michah* 4:4). May we merit bringing this messianic vision to fruition speedily in our days!