

Parshat Shelach

Why I Love This Land

The Exceedingly Good Land Prepared for the Jewish People

Parashat Shelach marks our personal anniversary of returning to Israel after having been separated from her during the four years we lived in the United States. Upon our return, Sefat Emet's teaching about the holiness of the Israel, helped us land. It was hard to return from the cushioned, soft, pampered life to the stark land of truth. Her bright light was almost too much to bear because, "All other countries are hazy lands, whereas the Land of Israel is light. The spiritual dimension is revealed in the Land of Israel, and here we can cleave to our source. This land is dedicated to the Jewish people, whose soul also illuminates their body so that it doesn't conceal the light of their soul. Therefore, the Land of Israel is suitable for the people of Israel..." (*Sefat Emet, Parashat Masei*, year 1901). I can't believe it will already be 27 years since we moved back and made our homestead in Bat Ayin. Every single time I must leave my Land for longer or for shorter, I miss Israel like a child missing the embrace of her mother.

ספר במדבר פרק יד פסוק ז... טוֹבָה הָאָרֶץ מְאֹד מְאֹד: (ח) אִם חִפְצָ בְּנֵי הַשָּׁם וְהִבִּיא אֶתְנוּ אֶל הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְנִתְּנָה לָנוּ אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר הוּא זָבֵת חֵלֶב וְדָבָשׁ:

"...The land we passed through to scout is an exceedingly good land. If Hashem desires us, He will bring us to this land and give it to us, a land flowing with milk and honey" (*Bamidbar* 14:7-8).

Below I share another Sefat Emet nugget about the holiness of the Land that resonates deeply within me, as well as a poem I wrote about why I love this land. I hope you will join me here sooner than later!

Activating the Hidden Light of the Land

Sefat Emet further explains what is so special about this "exceedingly good land," and how it is only special for the Jewish people: "The land of Israel is truly only prepared for the Jewish people. Only to the Jewish people is the good light hidden within the land revealed. The Israelites become rectified through the Land of Israel and the Land of Israel becomes rectified through the Jewish people. As it states in the midrash, our relationship with the Land of Israel is two-way. The land is suitable for us and we are suitable for her (*Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah* 23:6). "Your people are all righteous, they shall inherit the land לְעוֹלָם // *olam* – 'forever...' (*Yeshayahu* 60:21). The word לְעוֹלָם // *olam* can also mean 'hidden.' Although the holiness of the land is hidden within her, the Jewish people have the vessels to activate her latent *ohr haganuz* – 'hidden light.' Before the Jewish people entered the land, her light was hidden. This is why the spies called her, "...a land that eats her inhabitants" (*Bamidbar* 13:32); (*Sefat Emet, Parashat Bamidbar*, year 1901). In other words, it is the Jewish people's presence in the Land of Israel that brings out her beauty and holiness. Without the Jewish people, the land is "desolate and void." "Let there be light" only takes place after the Jewish people make Aliyah. When you come here at first, you may notice the rough thorns and sharp elbows. Yet, if you stick it out, you will merit to taste its sweetest, softest sweetness! How can we stand back in exile and wait for the Mashiach to come, when redemption is the culmination of our accumulated efforts to activate the hidden light of the holy land?

Why I Love This Land

Would you like to know why I love this Land?
 Here we experience the strength of G-d's hand.
 Instead of being awakened with a bell,
 the 6 am radio blasts, "Shema Yisrael!"

In the bus, kerchiefed women recite tehillim.
 On beaches in modest bathing suits we swim.
 We've got not only our own bathrooms and showers,
 We even have swimming pools with separate hours.

Standing on the street we can hitch a ride.
 Many a driver happily lets us sit inside.
 He may offer our son a suitable match.
 His daughter could be the perfect catch.

A short drive to the desert makes us feel free.
 The opposite direction takes us to the foamy sea.
 Nowhere is too far from the tropical nature reserve.
 In Ein Gedi manifold plants and birds, we observe.

Under the stars of the moonlit night,
 we can reach beyond the highest height.
 In the morning we revel in the lights
 of countless, diverse nature sights.

The holy Kineret takes our breath away.
 In its water we bring our children to play.
 Swimming in the sunset of this magical sea
 is an enchanted portal allowing us just to be.

To the prayer service in Israel nothing can compare.
 Especially heartfelt is our communal Shabbes pray'r.
 There is a synagogue at every street corner,
 for the celebrant as well as for the mourner.

In the market, if we don't have the right change,
 we can give tzedakah. This is simple to arrange.
 For a kilo of dates, we can bargain down the price.
 The same goes for pistachios, pears, cumin and rice.

At the crossroads we enjoy fresh-pressed juice,
 meeting new friends, that old friends introduce.
 We munch on salty sunflower seeds,
 while debating the latest political needs.

Despite the disputes we are all one,
breathing under the very same sun,
basking in the blueness of the sky,
even without knowing exactly why.

Why we love this land so incredibly much,
whether we are French, American or Dutch.
Even if we at times may be complaining,
our devotion to the land has no explaining.

Having traveled to the Far East, or lived in the West,
we all know that the Land of Israel is the very best.
Wherever we meet we greet each other, "Shalom!"
There exists no other land we can truly call home.