

Kinder Torah

כ"ב

Parashas Mattos-Masei

Eretz Yisrael

“You will inherit the Land and you will settle in it, because I have given the Land to you to inherit” (Bamidbar 33:53). The sefer Eved HaMelech cites this verse as the source for the mitzvah to live in Eretz Yisrael – the Land of Israel. There is a famous dispute between the Rambam and the Ramban whether this mitzvah remains a *D'oraysa* (Torah) mitzvah in our days, or whether it has the status of *D'rabannan* (Rabbinic mitzvah). All agree, however, that the mitzvah remains in force even today.

How precious is this Land to Hashem! The Medrash Rabba relates that The Almighty said to Moshe Rabbeinu that Eretz Yisrael is dearer to Him than any other place. It is a land flowing with milk and honey, *eret tzvi* (a cherished land). Similarly, Klal Yisrael is dearer to Him than any other nation. Therefore, He will bring Klal Yisrael in to Eretz Yisrael, as it is written, “This is the land that you will inherit” (Bamidbar 34:2).

How great was the love of our ancestors for this Land! The Rambam (Melachim 5:10) recounts that our great sages would kiss the stones of Eretz Yisrael and roll in its soil. The Medrash Rabba (parashas Voeschanan) – explains that Yosef's bones were buried in Eretz Yisrael, while Moshe Rabbeinu did not merit this. Why? Yosef thanked Hashem for Eretz Yisrael. When he was asked his identity after being sold as a slave he said, “I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews” (Bereshis 40:15). He identified himself with Eretz Yisrael, therefore he was buried there, as the verse states, “Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him” (Shemos 13:19). Moshe Rabbeinu, on the other hand, did not express the same identification with The Holy Land. When the daughters of Yisro told their father about Moshe Rabbeinu, they said, “A Mitzri saved us from the shepherds” (Shemos 2:19). Moshe heard and was silent. He did not object to being called a Mitzri. Therefore, he did not merit burial in Eretz Yisrael.

How great is the holiness of this land! The Shelah relates that the *kedusha* (holiness) of Eretz Yisrael is comparable to Gan Eden. Yerushalayim is referred to as *Shaar HaShomayim* (the Gate of Heaven) because all of our *tefillos*

(prayers) first travel to Yerushalayim, and from there they proceed up to Heaven. For this reason also, *tefillos* are heard better and accepted more in Eretz Yisrael. The Sefer Charedim adds that one who settles in Eretz Yisrael must have much more *Yiras Shamayim* (Fear of Heaven) than in Chutz La'aretz. Why? Because he is dwelling in the King's Palace.

Kinderlach . . .
Let us sum it all up with the words of Rav Yonason Eibushitz in his sefer, *Yaaros Devash*. A Jew reaches his ultimate perfection in Eretz Yisrael. There he can totally attach himself to Hashem, because there are no impure forces to separate him. A person's heart should always have a desire and yearning for Eretz Yisrael. Even if he fulfills all of his other desires, what does he have? The main thing is missing. As it is written, “If I forget you O Yerushalayim, let my right hand forget its skill. Let my tongue stick to my palate, if I fail to recall you, if I do not elevate Yerushalayim above my greatest joy” (Tehillim 137:5-6). What good is *simcha* if the place of ultimate true fortune is missing? *Kinderlach*, may we all merit to fulfill this mitzvah.

Whom Are We Thanking

“Abba, we learned a startling piece of Gemora today.”

“Please share it with me, Avi.”

“It is in Bava Kamma page 16a. The backbone of a person after seven years (in the grave) becomes a snake. This applies to those who do not bow down when saying “*modim*.” Abba, why does not bowing when praying the first word of the eighteenth *bracha* of the *Amida* carry such a strict punishment? What is the seriousness of the sin?”

“That is an excellent question, Avi. The Marsha explains that the punishment befits the deed done. The first snake originally walked upright. He was the king of the animals.¹ He should have subjugated himself to the Almighty and walked humbly, but he stood brazenly and sinned. Therefore, he was cursed with crawling on his stomach. We bow at ‘*modim*’ to humble and subjugate ourselves to the Creator of the universe. The sinner's spine commits the deed of the snake by not bowing, rather boldly standing upright. Therefore, it is punished by becoming a snake.”

“That is fascinating, Abba. I would like to learn more about this important blessing.”

“Come, let us begin, Avi. Bowing at ‘*modim*’ is an act of humility and subjugation. Bow your head and body together

until all of the vertebrae of your spine have separated. Then straighten up slowly, first your head, followed by the rest of your body.² Let us think for a moment ... Whom are we bowing to, and why are we bowing to Him? The words of the blessing elucidate the answer. ‘*Modim*’ can have two meanings. One is to comply or consent. We comply with Your G-dliness, Your rule of the universe (*hashgacha*), and accept You as our G-d.³ We acknowledge that Hashem is the Almighty Ruler of the universe, and we accept His rule upon ourselves. We humbly bow like a servant to his Master.⁴ The second meaning of ‘*modim*’ is thanks. ‘We are thankful to You that You Hashem are our G-d and the G-d of our fathers forever.’ Etz Yosef explains that we give thanks to You that You are Hashem our G-d, and Your desired us, called the Name of Your G-dliness upon us and our forefathers, as the verse states, ‘The G-d of Yaakov *selah*.’⁵ We are the only nation that You chose for this, and You have not exchanged us for any other people. ‘Rock of our lives’ – You carve out our lives, for our souls were hewed by You. You are the source of the soul, our life force, as the verse states, ‘He blew into his nostrils the soul of life.’⁶ You are our strong security.³ ‘Shield of our salvation,’ as the verse states, ‘You have given me the shield of Your salvation.’⁷ ‘You are in every generation.’

“Hashem is awesome, Abba. I want to give my entire life to Him.”

“Wonderful, Avi! That is the point of the beginning of this *bracha*.⁴ May you succeed in always continuing to grow in your appreciation of the Almighty, and your dedication to sanctifying His Holy Name.”

“Amen.”

Kinderlach . . .
The *bracha* of “*modim*” is very special in that it gives us the opportunity to serve Hashem with our bodies. We perform a humble act of subjugation when we bow down, separating all of the vertebrae of our spine. How great are You, Hashem! How small and undeserving are we. And yet, we have the privilege of bowing to You, acknowledging Your greatness, and thanking You for choosing to call Your Name upon our forefathers and us. You are the Rock of our lives, the Shield of our salvation, and have never switched us for any other nation. Through all of the generations, You are ours and we are Yours. May our relationship deepen and grow until the coming of Moshiach speedily in our days, amen!

¹ Gemora Sota 9b
² Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 113:4,5,6)
³ Iyun Tefillah
⁴ Yesod Vi'shoresh Ho'avodah
⁵ Tehillim 36:8
⁶ Bereshis 2:7
⁷ Tehillim 18:36