



RABBI AARON GOLDSCHIEDER

EDITOR, TORAH TIDBITS

To the Land of Promise

The parsha opens with the celebrated two words: *Lech Lecha*.

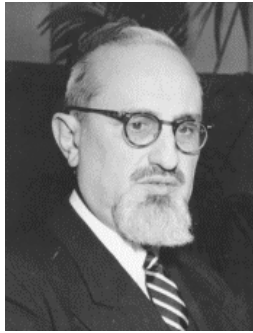
Rashi interpreted *lecha*, “for yourself,” to mean that the journey would be for Avraham’s own benefit. “There I will make you a great nation; here, you will not merit children.” The Talmud explicitly states that the special merit of the Holy Land benefited Avraham. But why did Avraham need to be in the Land to receive this blessing?

The seminal medieval philosopher and poet Rabbi Yehudah Halevi explained in his *Kuzari* that the Land of Israel is uniquely suited for the encounter between God and man, given its special metaphysical properties. In his famous dirge “*Tziyon Ha-lo Tishali*,” Halevi wrote: “The air of your land is the breath of life for our souls,” and many other medieval rabbinic figures adopted this line of thinking about the land’s holiness.

In his eulogy for Rabbi Wolf (Ze’ev) Gold, a leading figure in Religious Zionism and a signatory of the Israeli Declaration of Independence, Rabbi Soloveitchik said:

“I will never forget the evening in 5695 [1935] when I visited Rabbi Gold in Ramat Gan in Eretz Yisrael. He took me out to

the orange groves near his house. It was a beautiful night, the sky was a perfect blue and there were endless stars. The bright moon of Eretz Yisrael shone all over the enchanted beauty. From afar we could see the lights of the new all-Jewish city of Tel Aviv glistening in the dark. The lights were telling us the thrilling and intoxicating news of the rebuilding of the Holy Land. Overwhelmed with emotion, Rabbi Gold



gazed toward the horizon and then turned to me and said: “Whoever does not feel the presence of God in Eretz Yisrael on this beautiful night while looking at the magnificent moon and at these beckoning stars, breathing the clear and pure air filled with the fragrance of blossoming growth, and above all when looking at the glistening lights of the city that was built entirely by Jews, is simply blind.”

Rabbi Gold continued, “Rav Yehudah Halevi was right when he said that prophecy flows unhindered in Eretz Yisrael and we need only a proper vessel to receive its message.”

As we stood there, Rabbi Gold picked up a small pebble and kissed it, to fulfill Rav Abba’s dictum in the Talmud that he would

kiss the rocks of Akko. That night, I thought to myself how insignificant I was compared to this special Jew who was able to experience the glory of God through the grandeur of the landscape of the Land of Israel.”

The atmosphere of the Land of Israel is redolent of and with God.

A NATURAL DIVINING ROD

This explains why God said “to the Land I will show you” (Genesis 12:1), usually understood to mean that Avraham was not informed of his destination. Rashi said its identity was withheld “to make it beloved in his eyes.” The Ramban explored this a bit more deeply. He theorized that Avraham was not told where to go and wandered until he settled on Canaan, “not knowing that this was the land about which he was commanded.” Rabbi Soloveitchik elaborated that the journey was not linear, so that Avraham explored many countries, wondering if he had found the place that God had intended. At that point, God confirmed that he had found it by promising him, “I shall give this land to your offspring” (Genesis 12:7).

The Rav pointed to a strikingly similar scenario later in Avraham’s life. When God commanded Avraham to sacrifice Yitzchak, He said to do so “on one of the mountains which I shall tell you” (Genesis 22:2). Apparently, Avraham would need to identify it intuitively.

What is the significance of Avraham locating these holy sites on his own? The Rav thinks the notion that kedushah, holiness, is an attracting force might be “the greatest discovery made by Avraham.” The fact that Avraham could find his way to the holy sites without guidance suggests

that “the Almighty has implanted in the Jew a sensitivity to kedushah, to the holy.” In other words, the Jew naturally yearns for holiness and seeks to uncover and recognize it even when on the surface it is not apparent. This further indicates that knowledge of God is not merely abstract and intellectual but passionate and experiential.

This explains why Jews have a special place in their hearts for the Land of Israel and leave reason at the door in all that concerns it. It is our special place, a place where Avraham would go to birth our nation. The Rav explained:

“Our relationship to Eretz Yisrael is that of segulah. Whenever segulah comes to the forefront, to the foreground, ratiocination resigns. You cannot rationalize events which revolve around segulah. There is an element of *diminuendos*, of the frighteningly strange, and of the hidden ineffable in the segulah’s charisma.” ■

Rabbi Goldscheider is the author of the newly published book ‘Torah United’ (OU Press), featuring divrei Torah on the weekly parasha from Rav Kook, Rabbi Solovetichik, and the Chassidic Masters.



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