

EIKEV (DEUTERONOMY 7:11-11:25)

Dress Rehearsal

2004 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

Do you like grapes? How about figs? Dates? Have I got a country for you!

G-d is bringing you to a good land; a land with flowing streams and underground springs gushing out in valley and mountain. It is a land of wheat, barley, grapes, figs, and pomegranates; a land of oil-producing olives and (date) honey. It is a land where you will not eat bread in poverty, and you will not lack anything. ... When you eat and are satisfied, you will therefore bless G-d for the good land that He has given you. (Deuteronomy, 7:7-10)

The seven foods listed above enjoy a special status. They are referred to in Halacha (Jewish Law) as the “Seven species for which the Land of Israel is praised.” When these fruits and grains are consumed, there is a special blessing that is recited. This blessing is an abbreviated form of the full Grace after Meals that one says after a full meal. In this blessing, we thank G-d for the Land and its produce. Interestingly, this blessing is even recited when eating grapes, etc., that grew outside of Israel. Apparently, its mere association with Israel enhances its prestige.

Similarly, OUR association with Israel enhances OUR prestige. G-d took our People out of Egypt with the specific purpose of giving us the Commandments to fulfill in His Holy Land.

Consider the following. In the section of this week’s Torah Reading (11:13-21) that is read twice daily as the second paragraph of “the Shema”, we are reminded to follow the Commandments and anticipate G-d’s rewards. We are also warned that abandoning G-d’s ways could lead to banishment from the Land. Then the Torah reiterates last week’s commandments (6:7-9) of Tefillin, Mezuzah, and Torah study. The paragraph concludes with the statement that all this should be done so that we and our children will enjoy longevity in the Land that G-d has given to our ancestors.

What is the statement about Tefillin and Mezuzah doing in the middle of a discussion about whether or not we get to live in the Land? We already know about those Mitzvahs from last week’s Torah Portion! Why does the Torah repeat it right after telling us that we may be banished from the Land?

Rashi gives us a fascinating answer to this question. “Even after you have been exiled from the Land, put on Tefillin and make Mezuzahs, so that they won’t be new to you when you come back.”

“...SO THAT THEY WON’T BE NEW TO YOU WHEN YOU COME BACK!” Do you hear what Rashi is telling us?! He is implying that the whole reason for observing Commandments outside of Israel is so that we will remain acquainted with them when we go back to Israel!

The entire Jewish experience is an Israel-centric way of life. Israel-type fruits serve as a reminder. We pray facing Israel and we constantly beseech our Creator to return us to Zion. We put Mezuzahs on our doors so that we will remember how to do it when we go home.

WHEN we go home. When WE go home. When WILL we go home?

We look with pride (and fear) at our Jewish brothers and sisters who refuse to be intimidated by our enemies into leaving Israel. We congratulate Prime Minister Sharon for taking on the French anti-Semites and advising French Jews that it’s time to get out of there and come home to Israel. Yet, we sit comfortably in New York and Chicago and Norwich, practicing our Mitzvahs in the Diaspora, rather than doing the real thing in the Holy Land.

I can hear you grumbling already. (Especially those of my readers whose email addresses end with “.co.il.”) “Very nice, Rabbi Seplowitz! YOU’RE sitting there in Monsey, telling everyone else to go to Israel? Why don’t YOU put your money where your mouth (or computer keyboard) is, and get on the next plane to Israel?”

Good point. Good point. I am not saying that *Aliyah* today is the answer for everybody. But, at the very least, shouldn’t we be asking ourselves the question?

And we should certainly never delude ourselves into thinking that we are living optimally as Jews outside of Israel. We are, when all is said and done, strangers visiting in strange lands. Even for those of us living in Israel, our Holy Temple lies in ruins, desecrated by those who consider it a “Mitzvah” to kill Jews.

Jewish life is not what it could be, and it is not what it should be. Let us each redouble our efforts to serve G-d to the best of our ability, and beg Him to bring the Redemption. Let us plead with Him to rebuild the Temple, restore world peace, and once and for all, to bring us home.

Have a great Shabbos.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz