

WHERE IS HOME?

by Rabbi Yehudah Prero

Moshe, the great leader of Israel, who is described in the Torah as the "humblest of all men," had one request of G-d. In Devarim (3:23) we find Moshe relates the following to the nation of Israel: And I pleaded with Hashem at that time, saying "Hashem, our G-d, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness, and Your mighty hand; for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to Your works, and according to Your might? I beg You, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond the Jordan, that goodly mountain region, and Lebanon." Moshe wanted to enter the land of Israel with the nation. What was Hashem's response to Moshe's request to enter the land of Israel? "But Hashem was angry with me for your sake, and would not hear me; and Hashem said to me, Let it suffice you; speak no more to Me of this matter." G-d said no.

What happened? Why was Moshe denied the opportunity to enter the land of Israel? The Medrash (Devarim 2:8) relates the following: Rav Levi said "Moshe said before Hashem Master of the World, the bones of Yosef will enter the land of Israel, and I will not be allowed to enter the land?' Hashem responded The one who admitted to his homeland will be buried in his land, but the one who did not admit as to his land will not be buried in his land.

From where do we see this? The wife of Yosef's master in Egypt said "See, you have brought us a Hebrew (Ivri)," and Yosef did not deny that description, but said "I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews." Therefore, he was buried in that land (the land of Israel). But where do we see that the one who denied his land will not be buried there? The daughters of Yisro, upon meeting Moshe for the first time, said to Yisro "An Egyptian man saved us from the hands of the shepherds." and he (Moshe) stood there and remained silent, and therefore he was not buried in his land (in Israel)."

The Rebbe from Ostrovtza posed a question on this Medrash. Why were Moshe and Yosef equated, considering there was a large difference in the histories of these two individuals? Yosef was born in the land of Israel, and he was brought from there to Egypt. Therefore, his statement "I was stolen away from the land of the Hebrews" was an accurate description of his situation. However, Moshe was born in Egypt. He fled the land of Egypt and arrived in Midyan Therefore, when the daughters of Yisro described him as an Egyptian, they were giving an accurate description of Moshe. Moshe had no reason to object to this description. Why, then, was he punished for not describing himself as a "Hebrew," a description which was not totally accurate?

We find that Avraham was commanded by G-d to go to the land of Israel: "Go from your land . . . to

the land which I shall show you." This Mitzvah, to live in the land of Israel, was given to Avraham, not only for him to observe, but for the generations to follow him as well. It is similar, the Rebbe says, to the Mitzvah of circumcision, which was also given to Avraham not only for him to observe, but for the generations to follow him as well. Because Avraham and his children were given a commandment to live in Israel, the land of Israel then became the homeland of the nation of Israel. The fact that the entire nation, in the days of Moshe's youth, lived in Egypt did not change this fact. A person usually associates himself with his true homeland, regardless of where the individual happens to be found at any given moment. Moshe, the Rebbe says, should not have considered himself an Egyptian. He may have been born there, and he may have never lived anywhere else. Yet, Moshe should have felt so strongly about his true identity, that he was from the land of the Hebrews, that when he was called an Egyptian, he should have corrected that description. Because he did not do that, he was not allowed to enter the land of Israel.

Yom Ha'Atzmaut, Israel Independence Day, is on 5 Iyar, April 21, 1999. Although many of us may not live in the land of Israel, and many of us may never have stepped foot there, the Medrash teaches us an important lesson: We are not American, Canadian, Australian, British, Portuguese, Russian or Brazilian. We are all, in the words of Yosef "Me'Eretz Ha'Ivriyim," "from the Land of the Hebrews," from the land of Israel.

(from Hegyonai Halacha)