

THAT'S HEAVY!

by Rabbi Label Lam

A Land that HASHEM your G-d investigates; the eyes of HASHEM your G-d are constantly upon it from the beginning of the year to the year's end. (Devarim 11:12)

What's so alluring about Israel? Here's the one piece of real estate in the middle-east without oil, yet it is the jewel of the region and the object of desire for the entire world.

Rabbi Mendel Weinbach welcomed a group of American college students most of whom were visiting Israel for the first time. He related a story in the Talmud that describes how a sage traveling from Babylon to the Land of Israel would try to determine when he had actually crossed the border. As he approached Israel, he would stop and take some rocks in his hand. He repeated the procedure until finally while sampling some stones he sensed by their weight that he had arrived.

Rabbi Weinbach explained that the Talmud certainly did not mean to imply that there are measurable geological differences between the rocks outside as opposed to the rocks inside of Israel. What was being told over here is that there are certain kinds of rare and intense experiences that can be gained in Israel in a short period of time that it may take years in the Diaspora to achieve. There is a discernable spiritual density to even pedestrian life in the Holy Land.

A friend of mine had just returned from his first trip to Israel. I could see on his face that look I like to call the "inner tan". He was serious and focused. "How was it?" I asked.

"Terrible!" He said. "Nothing went right! From the moment we stepped off the plane there was nothing but set backs. Cars broke down. Hotel reservations fell through. Things got lost. We got lost. Almost nothing worked out the way we wanted. I spent a lot of time planning every detail of the trip and I met with nothing but frustration." It sounded like he had a bad experience yet his face shone with a deep seriousness that I had never seen on him before. Israel had impacted him but not in the way he expected.

Jerry was a hip hop American kid who came with us on one of those trips to Israel. We went to Kosel together and he was approached by a man to put on Tefillin for the first time since his Bar Mitzvah and offered 100 Shekels (about \$20 then) if he would take off his earring. He happily agreed and accepted the 100 Shekels. Days later he regretted his decision and wanted to put the earring back. It had been a fixed part of his identity. He went back numerous times to the Kosel but the man was not to be found. Jerry had the honesty not to put the earring back in. Years later, Jerry, now "Rabbi Yaakov..." is a fine young scholar who has influenced hundreds young people. I believe that brief

encounter at the Western Wall was a turning point, a life event that could not have happened for him on the college campus in four years or more.

Sefer Charedim compares the statement by King David "I place HASHEM opposite me always" to the verse describing the classic role of a wife as a "help mate opposing him". When he is worthy she actively assists him but when he is not she lovingly thwarts him.

Similarly we are warned before entering the Holy Land that not all behavior is tolerated at the "center stage" of history. The lights are extra bright. The camera eye is trained upon our every deed. Even small things are amplified. And so we are accordingly either frustrated or encouraged by the experience of being there. They may look like ordinary stones but they're not and that's heavy! Text Copyright © 2004 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.