

# IT'S OUR HOME

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

In last week's Parsha G-d promised us that we would become a light onto the nations. "The other nations will know of you and they will proclaim, "What a wise and understanding nation!" (4:6)

In this week's Parsha we were exhorted by Moshe to remove all traces of idolatrous practices from Eretz Yisroel, "for it is an abomination of G-d, your G-d." (7:25-26)

Moshe's concerns were not just for idolatry. His fears were for the potential assimilation of non-Torah values and practices into the beliefs and actions of the Jews. As we will see throughout Divarim (Deuteronomy), Moshe forewarned the Bnai Yisroel against the sins of Avodah Zarah (idolatry) and intermarriage more so than any other sins. Clearly, Moshe's focus against idolatry and intermarriage encompassed more than those individual transgressions. The Torah used the sins of idolatry and intermarriage as indicators of the nation's severe defection away from the commandments of G-d and their assimilation into society.

If we compare last week's and this week's Parshios, we seem to have been given two seemingly contradictory and therefore impossible missions. One mission was to influence the world at large and be a "light onto the nations." The other mission was to protect us from the negative influences of society.

On the one hand, our job of influencing the world demands that we become role models to the rest of humanity. In order to do so, we must understand their values and issues and help them comprehend how to integrate an active awareness of G-d into their daily lives. This requires that we understand them and that they trust us. To accomplish both, we must be in close contact with the non-Jewish, non-Torah world. On the other hand, our contact with society must be limited and circumscribed; otherwise, we are in danger of assimilating society's values rather than they integrating ours.

On the one hand, we must be a part of society; and on the other hand, we must be apart from society. How can we balance the two?

Furthermore, as a nation we are supposed to be living in Eretz Yisroel, not among the nations. Our symbiotic relationship with the land was the promise to our forefathers and the means for accomplishing our mission as the Chosen People. Nowhere in the Torah do we find G-d suggesting that we open a worldwide network that would place Jews in every corner of the world to influence and teach the non-Jewish world. In fact, the very opposite is true. Every single Jew was intended to

live in Eretz Yisroel and focus his energies on living a life of Torah and Chesed (kindness).

The manner of our being a "light unto the nations" seems from last week's Parsha to be more by osmosis than anything else. "You shall safeguard and perform them, (the Mitzvos) for it is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations..." The Torah then states, "They shall hear all these decrees and shall proclaim, 'Surely a wise and discerning people is this great nation.'" How were we supposed to earn their trust and influence their souls if we were to remain isolated from the other nations and protected from their non-Torah values?

Furthermore, imagine what our pluralistically oriented, politically correct, Jewish and non-Jewish world would think about the verses in this week's Parsha? "...Until the survivors and the hidden ones perish before you." (7:20) "...Will confound them with great confusion, until their destruction." (7:23) "...Cause their name to perish from under the heaven." (7:24) "...You will drive them out and cause them to perish quickly..." (9:3) How many sanctions would the UN have placed on the Bnai Yisroel in the aftermath of our campaign to occupy Eretz Yisroel?

How do each of us feel about G-d's seemingly merciless and racist commandments? Can we explain them? Can we justify them? In the aftermath of such a campaign, could we ever regain the world's trust and help them believe in a loving and judicious G-d, "...Who does not show favor and Who does not accept a bribe...and loves the proselyte to give him bread..." (10:17-18)

The key to understanding our obligations as teachers of G-d and truth and the most effective way for doing so is expressed in verse 7:26. "And you shall not bring an abomination into your home...you shall surely loathe it and you shall surely abominate it, for it is banned."

Eretz Yisroel is described as our "home." A home is not a place of pluralism or democracy. A home should not offer alternate values or life styles. A home should be a haven of security and clarity - secure from physical or emotional harm and clear in its values and expectations.

For example. Home safety is an obligation as well as an industry. Today you can hire safety consultants who will do everything from installing the latest in home security and surveillance to baby proofing. Homes have become smoke free environments and weapons, medicines, and household cleaners are locked away. Earthquake preparedness has the finest furniture bolted to walls, and smoke detectors should be standard in each room.

Imagine the guest who visits your safe and secure home and disregards your concern for second hand smoke. Imagine the guest who visits your safe and secure home and decides that your coffee table is the best place to leave his loaded gun or freshly honed combat knife. Imagine the guest who visits your home and expresses his opinions in front of your impressionable children with a liberal sprinkling of foul language, disregarding your having asked that he not do so.

Imagine the guest who visits your home and, without your permission and in clear disregard for your values and concerns, pops in a video whose rating and content is morally offensive. Imagine the

guest who joins your family for Shabbos and insists on eating without a kippah or behaving in a manner that intentionally disregards your concerns for the sanctity of the home and the day.

In each of the above vignettes, what should you do?

Let me add insult to injury.

Imagine that you confronted your guest and tactfully, but with strength and personal dignity, let him know how offensive, insensitive, and disrespectful his behavior had been. Imagine that with righteous indignation he justified himself using the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the good old American way? What then should you do?

I don't know what we would do in each of those instances, but we should ask him to leave; or at the very least, never invite him back into our home. Our homes are intended to have the greatest influence over our families, and their influence is more through osmosis than any other medium. As the old adage says, "Do as I do, not as I say."

Aryeh Kaplan explains in numerous essays that the influence of the Jew was supposed to emanate and radiate from Eretz Yisroel. The Jew was not supposed to go out to the world. The world was supposed to come to us. That is why Eretz Yisroel is strategically placed at the single juncture of three continents. Over the course of time, merchants, adventurers, and armies would have to make their way through Eretz Yisroel and visit our home. The Chosen People, following the example of Avraham and Sarah, would have opened their homes and invited the many visitors to experience a life style that integrated an awareness of G-d and a responsibility for all humanity. Like a guest who visits our homes, they would be enveloped in our lifestyle and values. They would then proclaim, "Surely a wise and discerning people is this great nation."

Unfortunately, because we did not use Eretz Yisroel as intended, G-d exiled us from our home and cast us to the four-corners of the earth. Instead of the world coming to us, we were forced to go to them.

If Eretz Yisroel is our home, and our home is intended to be the greatest source of influence, then our homes must be free of any negative or conflicting influences. "And you shall not bring an abomination into your home...you shall surely loathe it and you shall surely abominate it, for it is banned."

Eretz Yisroel was not intended to be a pluralistic smorgasbord of ideologies, theologies, and religions. Eretz Yisroel was intended to be our home. As such, it should be a place of security and clarity of values.

Our mandate to be "a light unto the nations" can be accomplished by relating to the non-Jewish and Torah world within the protective walls of our own home. Good hosts spend time with their guests listening and learning all they can about them. Through listening and learning, we can gain their trust and offer them our compassion and wisdom. At the same time, our contact is controlled and

circumscribed within the secure environment of our own homes.

It is quite amazing that the greatest challenges facing Eretz Yisroel today are issues of national security and the clarification of our identity and divine values. As Moshe prophetically forewarned more than 3,000 years ago, beware of idolatry and intermarriage, beware of assimilation.

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