

# FOR YOU NOT ME

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

Why did Moshe refer to Eretz Yisroel as "The Good Land?" What was he adding with the description, "This good mountain, Halevanon?"

Rashi explained that the "good mountain" refers to Yerushalayim (Jerusalem) and "Halevanon" refers to the Bais Hamikdash (Temple). Why did Moshe focus on Yerushalayim and the Bais Hamikdash more so than any of the other places in Eretz Yisroel (Land of Israel)?

The opening Pisukim of this week's Parsha bring us into the mind and heart of Moshe Rabbeinu. Until now Moshe has been a fearless leader of incomprehensible strength and determination. He was the man-prophet who had pierced the veil of G-d's hidden countenance and ascended beyond the realms of G-d's secreted manifestation. However, until this week's Parsha we only knew Moshe in relation to his mission as the servant of G-d, the teacher of His children, and the keeper of His nation. We never knew anything of Moshe's personal hopes, wishes and desires. However, in the opening of Vaeschanan Moshe shared with us what appears to be a uniquely personal and human side.

It is important to note that the purpose of Moshe's "sharing" was solely to teach a lesson to the Jewish nation. It was not intended as a catharsis or the musings of a dying man. For it to be recorded in the Torah it had to contain a message of singular significance for the generation entering the land as well as for all subsequent generations. From this glimpse behind Moshe's veiled person there is a profound lesson to be learned.

A short time before the teaching of Sefer Divarim Moshe "sinned" by hitting the rock rather than speaking to it. G-d immediately told Moshe Rabbeinu that he and Aharon would consequently not lead the Jews into the Promised Land. Instead, they would join their own generation and die on the East side of the Yarden.

At the time, the Torah did not record any response from Moshe and Aharon. In fact, the absence of any response on their part reinforces the impression that Moshe and Aharon specifically did not challenge G-d's decree. Instead, their very silence echoed the profound silence of Aharon following the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, and the "falling on their faces" that Moshe and Aharon had done whenever the nation challenged the divinity of their appointments. (see R.S.R. Hirsch) It furthered our assumption of Moshe and Aharon's personal humility and their dedication to the word of G-d. Therefore, Moshe's "confession" that he had challenged G-d's decree to the extent that G-d had to say, "You have spoken enough. This conversation is over!" demands further explanation.

Moshe clearly wanted to enter Eretz Yisroel; however, it was equally clear that G-d did not want Moshe to do so. Was this questioning and challenging man the same Moshe who for forty years had been the quintessential model of total subservience to G-d? Was this the same Moshe who exemplified the Mishnah, "Make G-d's will your own"?

Rashi (3:24) referenced the Sifri that states, "It was You (G-d) Who taught me to challenge Your decrees! At the time of the Golden Calf You said to me, "And now leave Me alone and I will destroy them (Jewish nation)". In telling me to leave You alone You revealed that it was up to me to not leave You alone. It was up to me to pray and beg You to change Your mind. Therefore, in this instance I did the same. I prayed to you to rescind Your decree and permit me to enter the Promised Land!"

If we contrast the two instances referenced by Rashi we must conclude that Moshe's motive for attempting to rescind G-d's decrees in each instance was the same. Just like in the instance of the Golden Calf Moshe was motivated solely by his love for Am Yisroel and what he understood to be the will of G-d, so too in the instance of his having hit the rock his motivation for challenging G-d's decree must have been for the sake of the nation and what Moshe understood G-d's will to be.

What was so special about Eretz Yisroel that Moshe desperately wanted to enter her borders? My Grandfather ZT"L explained that there are two elements to being in Eretz Yisroel. 1. The ability to do those Mitzvos that can only be performed in Eretz Yisroel and cannot be performed outside of Israel. 2. To simply be in the proximity of greater Kedusha (sanctity) is important even if there aren't any more Mitzvos to be performed.

My Grandfather ZT"L's insight does not seem to help. Both reasons are unique to Moshe the individual rather than Moshe the leader. We need a motive that would have been for the nation's sake and only benefit Moshe by association.

Eretz Yisroel was promised to the Avos (Forefathers) and given to the Jews as a tool. To the extent that they use Eretz Yisroel as intended by G-d, it remains theirs. To the extent that they misuse Eretz Yisroel is the extent to which they were exiled from her borders and yet await the final redemption and return.

Eretz Yisroel in conjunction with Torah and Am Yisroel is the perfect setting for the nation to accomplish its goals. Those goals are to be "A light unto the nations" and to "dwell apart from the other nations." The only way this can be accomplished is for the Jews to live in Eretz Yisroel and follow the Mitzvos of G-d.

We are a light unto the nations by becoming living examples of the integration of the Dvar Hashem - the word of G-d into our daily lives. As I have explained in previous issues, our mission is the blessing given to Avraham at the beginning of Lech Lecha. "Through you will be blessed all the families of the earth and through your children." The emphasis of that blessing is "the families of the earth." It does not state the nations of the earth. It emphasizes the families. The only way families can learn is by example. There are far too many variables involved in the proper management of a family to

relegate its ever-fluctuating complexities to books or lectures. All the consulting in the world will not teach as much as seeing firsthand a successful family in action. The intent was for the other "families / nations" to visit Jewish families doing their own thing in their own land. By example they would see how to raise a family on principles of belief in G-d, truth, respect, and scholarship.

The Baal Teshuvah movement since the late sixties is proof of this. As individuals returned to the fold and began building families of their own they discovered that the integration of Halacha (Jewish law) into daily living is far more than what was taught in yeshivas and programs. In fact, many Baalei Teshuvah are more book knowledgeable than their counterparts in the FFB (Frum From Birth) world. However, the FFB grew up in a setting that, although often not perfect, nevertheless presented a living example of the balance between knowing and doing.

Belonging to a community certainly helps. Seeking out family mentors willing to open their homes and share their families helps. However, the most effective process for integrating and balancing will always be raising a child in a religious home. The Bracha to Avraham was that his children would be FFB's.

If the Jews had done their job they would have never been sent into exile. However, once we lost Eretz Yisroel we had to go into Galus (exile) to continue the work of Avraham's blessing. If the other nations do not come to us we must go to them!

In Galus we must still remain apart and distinct. From the first exile in Egypt until this day, Jewish survival depended on being apart and distinct from the rest of society. However, without Eretz Yisroel we cannot fulfill the optimum blessing of "A nation that dwells apart..." Without dwelling apart in Eretz Yisroel we cannot be a complete "blessing to the other families of the earth."

Knowledge of G-d, His commandments, and His Torah must be transmitted by example. Therefore, Torah must be taught by a teacher. (An indispensable consequence of the Torah SheBaal Peh system.) Moshe was the greatest teacher the Jews had. His job was to teach a livable Torah to a nation of Baalei Teshuvah. There were no parents from whom to learn. There were no families to show how to do it - how to balance life and the word of G-d. There was only Moshe.

When Moshe went to heaven to receive the Torah he had to defend his and Am Yisroel's right to take the Torah. Moshe did so by pointing out that the Mitzvos were not written for angels. They were designed for humans' living human lives. The 40 days and nights that Moshe spent in heaven was the amount of time necessary to learn the Torah and how to apply the Torah. (The six handbreadths of the Luchos)

As Moshe prepared the Bnai Yisroel for their transition into Eretz Yisroel, Moshe knew that the nation was leaving the desert laboratory and entering the real world. If ever there was a time that the Jews needed Moshe it was then. Therefore, Moshe revealed to the Bnai Yisroel that he had beseeched G-d, on their behalf, to allow him to cross over the Yarden.

Moshe said to G-d, "Now that You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and might." G-d's greatness is not solely in the written words of His Torah. G-d's greatness is in how livable the words of the Torah are! Now that they were about to enter the real world and begin applying Halacha to real daily living, Moshe desired to be there to teach them and direct them.

At the end of Bamidbar the process had already begun with the stories of the Bnos Tzelaphchad and the deal Moshe cut with the tribes of Reuven and Gad. Those were examples of practical, livable, teaching and the integration of the Dvar Hashem into daily living! That was what Torah was all about! "Now that You have begun to show me, now I am going to die? It didn't make sense!

Moshe's desire is captured in the gradated perfection of Eretz Yisroel, Yerushalayim and the Bais Hamikdash. The key words in the first Pesukim of the Parsha are "Hatovah and Hatov." The word Tov was explained by Rav Hirsch as the essence of integration. A system where every component functions as intended, and at the same time they complement all the other components so they work properly with each other, earns the title of Tov. Eretz Yisroel, Yerushalayim, and the Bais Hamikdash were intended as actual living examples of how the word of G-d can be fully integrated into real life. That integration sets apart Eretz Yisroel, Yerushalayim, and the Bais Hamikdash from any other place in the world. They best represent the goal of being a nation "that dwells apart from all others."

The more apart a thing is, the more exclusive it becomes. The more apart and exclusive it is, the clearer its purpose becomes. The clearer the purpose, the more exclusive and apart, the greater will the Kedusha be. Moshe wanted to live the Torah in the most complete and integrated way possible. Moshe wanted to see the good land, the good mountain, and the Bais Hamikdash.

There are two dimensions to G-d's goodness. One is experiencing the goodness by doing His commandments. The second is seeing others living a life of doing His Mitzvos. As my Grandfather ZT'L explained, Moshe desired both. For the sake of his nation Moshe wanted to cross over the Yarden and show the Bnai Yisroel how to live G-d's Torah. At the same time he wanted to reap the Nachas (joy) of seeing the Bnai Yisroel living G-d's Torah. He wanted to do the Mitzvos and he wanted to be in the exclusive setting of Kedusha generated by Am Yisroel doing G-d's Mitzvos.

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