

# WHY THE LAND OF ISRAEL?

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The Torah teaches us that our father Avraham was told to leave his home in Mesopotamia and to travel to an unknown land, which eventually turned out to be the Land of Israel. Midrash points out to us that the entire success of Avraham's mission in life - to spread the idea of monotheism and the universal God - was dependent on his living in the Land of Israel.

The question naturally arises why this should have been so. After all, he could have been successful in so doing had he remained in Mesopotamia, which then was the center of human civilization and culture while the Land of Israel was somewhat of a backward, out of the way place.

There are many possible answers to this question but the one that intrigues me most is as follows. Being successful in spiritual missions and growth always requires sacrifice and some physical discomfort. The prophet castigates those that are complacent and comfortable in Zion.

A person is born to toil and accomplish, to be busy and productive. Without undergoing the arduous and potentially dangerous journey to the Land of Israel, Avraham will never fulfill his spiritual destiny. Avraham is the symbol of challenges in life.

The ten tests that he undergoes shape him and mold him into the father of our people and the symbol of human civilization and monotheistic progress. Only by leaving his comfortable and familiar surroundings can he achieve greatness. It is therefore imperative for him to leave and to wander, to be a stranger and an alien in foreign society in order to grow into his great spiritual role of influence and leadership.

But why the Land of Israel as the desired destination for Avraham? Jewish history provides us with this insight. It is in the Land of Israel that a Jew can truly achieve spiritual elevation and development. The Land of Israel provides greater challenges to Jewish development than any other location on the face of this earth.

Throughout Jewish history, the Land of Israel has posed the greatest challenge to Jewish communal living. It is no surprise therefore that we who live in Israel find it to be a daily struggle in our lives. Nevertheless, it is the place for the greatest Jewish accomplishments and achievements. And therefore it is the destination for Avraham in his quest for spiritual growth and attainment.

He will find it to be a difficult place to live in. But as he struggles with his tests in life and rises to each challenge and occasion the Lord promises him that the Land of Israel will be his place on earth for

all of his generations.

The challenge of living in the Land of Israel has never waned but God's promise to the Jewish people has always remained in force as well. It seems obvious that the ultimate fulfillment of Jewish life can only be realized in the Land of Israel. The problems faced there sometimes seem overwhelming. But the rabbis stated that according to the pain and difficulty so is the reward. As the children of Avraham and Sarah we are bidden to rise and overcome all of our tests and challenges as well.

Shabat shalom.

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