

I

This past Wednesday evening, there was a very sobering but powerful ceremony held at the Kotel. For those who may have seen the images, a Hachnasas Sefer Torah was held in commemoration of the 75 soldiers who fell in Operation Protective Edge, this time last summer. 75 Sifrei Torah, both Ashekinazic and Sephardic were dedicated at our holiest of places, one in memory of each fallen soldier. Many of the Sifrei Torah survived the holocaust and through generous donors from around the world, they were refurbished, redressed and dedicated this week, to be sent out to shuls and Jewish Institutions throughout the state of Israel.

The power of the ceremony was not only the image of dozens upon dozens of beautiful sifrei Torah beaming in the lights of the kotel plaza (which was itself was a magnificent sight), but the reminder with the Kotel as its backdrop, that through the tremendous sacrifice of young Jewish men and women, Jewish life and the Jewish faith flourish in the State of Israel today in a way which many generations were never privileged to see. As these Torah's were celebrated by religious and political leaders alike, by soldiers, dignitaries and citizen; as these Torahs are sent around the country, fulfilling the vision of *ki mitzion teitzei sora, udvar hashem m'yerushlayim* to its fullest, it was a mournful night but a proud reminder that Yerushalayim has in many ways returned to its truest glory.

II

Countless times in Sefer Devarim, Moshe Rabbeinu uses the expression, *hamakom asher yivchar Hashem* – the place Hashem will choose to rest his name, the spiritual epicenter of the Jewish people, the location of the Beit HaMikdash. He reiterates that when Mikdash is established there,

it will become the sole place of sacrifice, the celebration of Jewish Holidays, the location of the Sanhedrin, the Hakhel reading of the king. Yet, in the half dozen times in our Parsha alone and the dozens more in all of Sefer Devarim that Moshe continues to use this expression of this “chosen place”, at no point is Yerushalayim ever mentioned by name or geographical location. It is simply “the place that G-d will choose.”

If one only read Sefer Devarim, you might think that the Capital City of Israel was very much still to be determined. This should come as quite a shock! From the early days of the Akeidah and the dreams of Yaakov, the ladder and the angels, Har Hamoria had been known as a singular place for our forefathers. Destiny would have it that all our Batei Mikdash would be built there as well. And yet, the Torah and Moshe Rabbeinu never reveal the mysterious location of this crucial spiritual destination! Just a few weeks ago, we read how Moshe designated cities of refuge throughout the land, not wanting to leave their placement undetermined for the leaders who followed. Arei Miklat he covers all the details and yet regarding Yerushalayim he gives not a single instruction; not even a clue! How could it be that our most important city is left unnamed and its location undefined? What is the mystery of Yerushalayim in Sefer Devarim meant to teach us?

III

There are many answers suggested for this question, most famously by the Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim, but this morning I’d like to offer two alternatives that contain very relevant messages this Rosh Chodesh Elul.

The Kli Yakar reminds us, that conquering Har Hamoria, settling Yerushalayim and building the Mikdash there, was a long and arduous process. It wouldn’t be until hundreds of years after Moshe’s death that Yerushalayim would be won by David HaMelech. During those in between years, the Mishkan would move from place to place. It would be housed in Shilo when Yehoshua conquered the land and other cities to follow.

Recognizing that the ultimate location was still far into the future, The Kli Yakar argues, that Moshe worried about undermining the sanctity of each of the places the Mishkan would inhabit prior. In downplaying the objectivity and sanctity of Jerusalem (the ultimate destination), Moshe strengthened the people's awe for the Mishkan, wherever and whenever they were fortunate enough to possess it. In doing so Moshe reminded us to celebrate both the destination and the journey; **that every step counts, even if it's not the final one.**

Second, we find a striking parallel between Avraham Avinu and David Hamelech. Avraham is told he must offer Yitzchak as a sacrifice and the Midrash observes that he too was not told a precise location for where the akeidah would take place. Hashem vaguely instructs him to travel *Al ached heharim asher omar eilecha* – to one of the mountains, which I will show you. In his trademark zealousness, Avraham begins his travels unknowing– and it might be argued that Hashem never told him where it was. “*Vayar es hamakom m'eirachok* – he saw it from a distance – before he was **told** its location, he **discovered** Har Hamoria on his own.

Similarly, at the end of Sefer Shmuel II during the reign of David HaMelech, the Navi tells us that while angry with the Jewish people Hashem releases an angel of death, an epidemic ravages the land. Worrisome about his people and the destruction now approaching his palace, David negotiates with a Yevusi priest named Aravna, purchases a threshing floor from him on which he built an altar. There David brings korbanos to Hashem, the plague stops and Sefer Shmuel comes to an end. Although David was never granted the privilege of building the Mikdash himself, Shlomo would realize his father's dream. Where did he build that temple? He built it on the very same spot, the Goren of Arvana – the same threshing floor where his father **discovered** the answer to his prayers and the salvation of his kingdom.

The lives of Avraham Avinua and David HaMelech were forever changed by their experiences on Har Hamoria. But rather than being told where they should position themselves both of them were made to **discover** its location, its **significance** and its **power** on their own. Yaakov Avinu said it most clearly when he awoke from his dream: *Achein Yeish Hashem Ba'makom Hazeh v'anochi lo yadoti.* "I didn't even know!" Apparently, Yerushalayim was never intended to be handed to us, Moshe was never meant to give us the directions, each generation from Avraham, to Yitzchak to Dovid, was meant to find Jerusalem for themselves.

Thus on a national level, the message of this holy spot and its being described "the place Hashem will choose" – is twofold. It reminded the Jewish people that despite having a pre-determined homeland and religious epicenter to their world, they could create and contribute from wherever they found themselves; even if Yerushalayim was not yet theirs. And not knowing exactly where they were going, reminded our people that the process of discovery is as empowering and influential as the results of the search.

IV

What is true on a geo-political and national level is true for the individual as well. Particularly as we begin the month of Elul and look out on the path we're headed these upcoming 40 days from Rosh Chodesh through Yom Kippur. Every individual has a personal mission; a sense of purpose and destiny that Teshuva is supposed to return me to who I really am. And in that process we benefit from these two lessons.

First: Teshuva is a process that happens in very small stages, with its fair share of setbacks. If we hold ourselves to the standard of perfection, in our relationships with others and in our observance of mitzvos, we'll inevitably disappoint ourselves and underachieve. But if we admit that our destination is still far away, and we can celebrate the small gains we are able to make in the process, all of a sudden, we become more forgiving of

ourselves, we feel a greater sense of accomplishment and the journey becomes much more feasible.

Second; much like Yerushalayim, we need not have a clear vision of where Teshuva is supposed to take us. What areas are we supposed to perfect? What mitzvot should I revisit? Who am I supposed to be, come Yom Kippur? Moshe Rabbeinu promised us: *U'vikashta m'sham et Hashem elokecha u'matzata*. At the very beginning of Elul, we need not know exactly where we're headed to start out on our mission. If we search for ourselves, we'll know it when we see it.

V

After being freed from prison and returning home, Nelson Mandela observed:

*There is nothing like returning to a place that remains unchanged to find the ways in which **you yourself** have been altered.*

On this Rosh Chodesh Elul, with the image of Yerushalayim in our hearts, with Yom Kippur marked on our calendars, we remind ourselves about the power of return; to destinations both geographical, personal and spiritual. Through teshuva we come home to places once lost, to a Yom Kippur which we've observed many times, but if we can accept that challenge and begin to reflect on our potential, the power and awe of those experiences will flourish with us when we finally make it home.

והנה המקום אשר יבחר ה' א-לקיכם בו לשכון שמו ושם שמה תביאו את כל אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם עולתיכם וזבחיכם מעשרתיכם ותרמת ידכם וכל מבחר נדריכם אשר תדירו לה':
השומר לך פן תעלה עלמדיך בכל מקום אשר תראה: כי אם במקום אשר יבחר ה' באחד שקטיד שם תעלה עלמדיך ושם תעשה כל אשר אנכי מצוה:

פרק יד - בקשר למעשר שני
פרק טו, כ - בקשר לבכור
פרק טז, ב-טז - בקשר לשלשתהרגלים
בפרק יז, ח-י - בקשר לבית הדין הגדול
בפרק כו, ב - בקשר לביכורים
בפרק לא, יא - בקשר למצות הקהל

ספר מורה הנבוכים חלק שלישי פרק מה

ואין ספק אצלי ג"כ שהמקום אשר ייחדו אברהם בנבואה היה ידוע אצל משה רבינו ואצל רבים, שאברהם צוה אותם שיהיה בית עבודה, כמו שבאר המתרגם ואמר, ופלה וצלי אברהם תמן באתרא ההוא, ואמר קדם ה' הכא יהון פלחין דריא וכו', ואשר לא התבאר בתורה ולא נזכר בפרט, אבל רמז אליו ואמר אל המקום אשר יבחר ה' וגו', יש בו אצלי שלש חכמות, האחת מהן, שלא יחזיקו בו האומות וילחמו עליו מלחמה חזקה כשידעו שזה המקום מן הארץ הוא תכלית התורה. והשנית, שלא יפסידוהו מי שהוא בידם עתה וישחיתוהו בכל יכלתם. והשלישית, והיא החזקה שבהם, שלא יבקש כל שבט היותו בנחלתו ולמשול בו, והיה נופל עליו מן המחלוקת והקטטה כמו שנפל בבקשת הכהונה, ולזה באה המצוה שלא יבנה בית הבחירה אלא אחר הקמת מלך שיצוה לבנותו ותסתלק המחלוקת, כמו שבארנו בספר שופטים.

רבינו בחיי בן אשר (המאה ה-13, ספרד), דברים יב, ה

כי אם אל המקום אשר יבחר ה' א-לקיכם מכל שבטיכם - המקום הזה הר המוריה הוא, והיה נודע ומפורסם באומות, כי ידעו מעלתו בקבלה, אין צריך לומר ישראל במדבר שהיו יודעים זה מן האבות בהיות שם עקדת יצחק. ומה שסתם הכתוב המקום הזה ולא אמר בפירוש שהוא הר המוריה הנודע והמפורסם לכל, כתב הרמב"ם ז"ל בספר המורה כי העלמת המקום לשלושה עניינים... ואין צריך לומר האומות, כי אפילו ישראל לא ידעוהו כי אע"פ שידעו הכל מעלתו של הר המוריה לא היו יודעין כי הוא המקום אשר יבחר ה'.

רש"י בראשית פרק יב

אל הארץ אשר אראך - לא גלה לו הארץ מיד, כדי לחבבה בעיניו, ולתת לו שכר על כל דבור ודבור. כיוצא בו (בראשית כב ב) "את בנך את יחידיך אשר אהבת את יצחק", כיוצא בו (כב ב) "על אחד ההרים אשר אומר אליך", כיוצא בו (יונה ג ב) "וקרא עליה את הקריאה אשר אנכי דובר אליך":

כלי יקר על התורה, דברים פרק יב פסוק ד

ומה שנאמר "אשר יבחר ה'" ולא גילה את המקום מיד, נתן הרב המורה שלשה טעמים בדבר, זכרם מהרי"א בספרו. ואומר אני שיש סוד בדבר, כי אפילו לאברהם לא גילה מיד ואמר "על אחד ההרים אשר אומר אליך" וקרא שמו "ה" יראה" כי הוא יתברך הרואה ואין איתנו יודע עד מה. וקרוב לשמוע שלכך לא גילהו שלא ינהגו בזיון בשילה ונוב וגבעון כשידעו בבירור שלא זו הנחלה והמנוחה.