

## **CHIZUK AND IDUD**

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra  
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael  
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

Eikev 2020, updated 2021

At this time of year families are thinking about where they can 'get away' for a summer vacation. Under normal circumstances, budget concerns, fun activities, and questions of availability, are uppermost in people's minds. This year, however, with the corona pandemic pervading the globe, choices are much more limited. This week my family vacationed 'up north' scampering up mountain trails, and descending paths into valleys and streams, in the beautiful nature reserves of the Upper Galilee and the Golan Heights. (My wife and I opted to stay home for safety reasons)

(This year 2021 we do plan to join our family and hope this is the right decision).

Seeing Eretz Yisrael's hidden, and not so hidden, wonders of nature brings to mind a passage from the Sifri on this week's parsha. The Midrash comments upon a number of p'sukim from the parsha providing us with the broader context of the Torah's discussion.

The Sifri describes how the Jewish people wondered about the conditions they would meet up with upon

entering the Promised Land. The conditions of life in Egypt were all they had directly experienced - what would this new land be like? "Will we be entering a land as beautiful as Egypt?" the people asked. The Midrash tells us, that the following p'sukim are an answer to their query: "Hashem responded: 'The Land that you are about to inherit is more beautiful and praiseworthy than Egypt.' As the pasuk says: "For the Land to which you are coming to inherit is not like the land of Egypt from which you left, in which you sow your seed, and water it with your foot like a vegetable garden. The Land you are passing over into to inherit is a land of mountains and valleys, drinking water from the rain of Heaven. It is a Land that HaShem your God inquires about, always the eyes of Hashem your God are upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year."

According to Rashi, Moshe's point in the above p'sukim was to sing the praises of the Land of Israel, pointing out how the quality of life here is significantly better than that experienced by the inhabitants of Egypt. Unlike life in the Egyptian Nile Valley where one had to work arduously to irrigate the soil - pumping water up from the Nile River in order to irrigate the adjacent fields - in Israel the rain descending from the heavens waters the crops while one sleeps.

Ramban, however, disagrees with Rashi's understanding of the above passage. Ramban sees the last verse in the above passage ["It is a land that Hashem attends. His eyes upon it constantly from the beginning of the year until the end of the year" (D'varim 11:10-12)], as a clear proof that the Torah's intention was not to claim that life in the Land of Israel is necessarily better than life in Egypt. Moshe's point was an entirely different one: He wished to prepare the people for the unique realities of life in Israel. Moshe wished to impress upon the people the understanding that everyday life in Eretz Yisrael would be influenced by the people's spiritual level. He was readying them, specifically, for the fact that one should not take the fertility of the Land for granted. In Israel it will all depend on how we act. Here, the ecological status of the land is determined by man's moral status, on whether or not we observe the Torah. Unlike the waters of the Nile, which Man directs to where they are needed, the rain in Eretz Yisrael depends on Hashem's good will which is ultimately a function of Man's behavior. Thus, these p'sukim serve as a warning that only if the people observe all the Commandments, would they merit to possess a "land flowing with milk and honey".

This message is not restricted only to rainfall. Rather, it is descriptive of all that transpires in the Holy Land. Everything, from our security to our health, is dependent upon our behavior. While this is true the world over, it is more evident and truer in the Holy Land.

R. David Zvi Hoffman zt"l, adds a comment which can bring Rashi and Ramban somewhat closer to one another: R. Hoffman states that "this is not like the Land of Egypt" - The fact that Hashem's "hand" is what is required to provide the rain, is in and of itself an expression of deep praise of Eretz Yisrael. Here the People of Israel are directly "dependent on Chasdei Hashem" - what an exalted spiritual plane, or 'Madrega'!

Returning to the Sifri, I would add that many potential Olim are troubled by a similar question: They know what life is like in Chutz LaAretz, but what would life be like if they were to come on Aliyah?

To those we can reply: There is no Land like Eretz Yisrael! Life here might not always be easy but even then, you are on a wholly (Holy) different Madrega - spiritual plane!

**Rabbi Yerachmiel Roness**

*Ramat Shiloh Beit Shemesh*