

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

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In B'reishit 12:7 we are told: "And Hashem appeared to Avraham and said: 'To your offspring will I give this Land', so he built a Mizbei'ach (altar) to Hashem who had appeared to him."

Rashi explains that Avraham was moved to build a Mizbei'ach as a result of having just received a double promise: Both a blessing regarding future offspring (L'ZAR-ACHA), as well as the promise of the inheritance of the Holy Land. Although this is seemingly a rather straightforward comment, Rashi's words present a puzzling challenge to his close readers: Isn't Rashi's commentary merely an exact repetition, or restatement, of the content of the pasuk? If Rashi has indeed added nothing new to the words of the pasuk itself, than what was the purpose of his comment?

A deeper look reveals that there is a Chidush in Rashi's words. As Rashi's super commentators explain, a simple reading of the pasuk may have

led to a competing understanding: Emphasizing the last words of the verse, one may reach the conclusion that it was not the specific contents of the revelation that led Avraham to build an altar, but rather the very fact that he had merited to directly communicate with the Divine. The experience of receiving N'vu'a is seen - in and of itself - as an occasion worthy of being marked by the building of an altar to G-d ("...so he built a Mizbei'ach to Hashem who had appeared to him").

In other words, Rashi wishes to steer us away from the understanding that Avraham erects an altar as a show of gratitude towards G-d for having been chosen as the recipient of a divine communication. Why though is this understanding rejected by Rashi? - As explained by Rashi's super-commentaries, although this competing possibility seems reasonable enough, it does not fit in to the Torah's words. If indeed the altar was erected as a sign of gratitude for having merited N'vu'a, then an additional difficulty is raised: Why was the Mizbei'ach only built now, and not earlier on, when Avraham initially began to fill his role a Navi? Why did he not build an altar after receiving the commandment of LECH L'CHA MEI-ARTZ'CHA? If that first revelation was not enough to move

Avraham to erect an altar - then what changed with this second revelation?

To this Rashi replies: It was the specific content of this revelation (offspring and the Holy Land) - not the very fact of the revelation - that moved Avraham Avinu to build a Mizbei'ach.

We may have reached a deeper understanding of Rashi's words, however, it seems clear that Rashi's approach is not the only tenable one. One could posit that it was not the content of the revelation, but rather the qualitative difference between the two revelations that explains Avraham's different response to each of the revelations. Only after he experienced the second revelation, which opened him up to a deeper, fuller and more encompassing GILU'I SH'CHINA, did he feel moved to erect a Mizbei'ach Lashem.

The Ramban follows this understanding, explaining that whereas Avraham received the N'vu'a of LECH L'CHA in his sleep, or via Ru'ach HaKodesh, during this second revelation 'Hashem appeared to him' - here he experienced a higher form of prophecy - N'VU'A via MAR'EH or MACHAZEH (vision).

Of course, the Ramban's explanation begs a follow-up question: Why was

this second revelation on a higher level than the first? The Ha'emek Davar writes that since up until this point Avraham had been outside the borders of the Land of Israel, therefore the GILU'I SH'CHINA he received was an auditory one, only now that he came to Eretz Yisrael could G-d reveal himself more fully - 'Hashem appeared to him'.

Similarly, the Mesech Chochma writes that the spiritual element inherent in Man, longs to apprehend the glory of the Sh'china. However, the ability to 'see' G-d is clouded over by the physical component of Man. Only in Eretz Yisrael can this dross be removed. This can perhaps be likened to a spiritual cataract which prevents one from apprehending spirituality. Only in Eretz Yisrael can these "cataracts" be removed and one can attain 20/20 (or 6-6) spiritual vision.

[A student once complained to me about an 'anti-semitic' professor who spoke in class of his experiences visiting the Kotel HaMa'aravi. The professor likened the scene to a country fair, or to a loud sporting event. My response was that in no way did such a remark prove anti-semitic leanings, if anything, it was proof that this professor was spiritually blind...]

The Talmud (Shabbat 31a) writes that

we should always be thinking about the Mashiach. TZIPITA LISHU'A?) - Have you been anticipating the Redemption?

One must continually long for, pine for, cry for, a Messianic denouement of history - and yet, somehow or other, so many of us have 'spiritual cataracts' blinding our view.

We somehow manage to forget that the inheritance of Eretz Yisrael (as ceremonially promised to Avraham Avinu in this week's Parsha) was the reason that our People were taken out of Mitzrayim and given the Torah. Although the doors to the Land are wide open, the actual Aliyah statistics from Western countries are still abysmally low, yet the latest numbers seem to be creeping up.

The time has come to wake up and do our part for the fulfillment of Jewish destiny - this is our Jewish duty!

