

BILVAVI

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REMAINING LOYAL TO HASHEM IN ERETZ YISRAEL

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THE TEST OF ENTERING ERETZ YISRAEL

In *Parshas Shelach*, Hashem says to Moshe, “Send for you men who will spy out the land of *Canaan*.” Rashi says, “I am not commanding you, but if you wish, you may send according to your own understanding.”

Eretz Yisrael is the most superb of all lands, and that is why going to live in *Eretz Yisrael* is called *aliyah*, “ascending,” because it is an ascent to this highest of all places.

Whenever a person tries to ascend and go higher, he faces challenges along the way, and he might decide to run away from it. Entering *Eretz Yisrael*, which means making *aliyah* to *Eretz Yisrael*, is always going to be a difficult test for anyone. Just as the generation in the desert was tested when trying to enter *Eretz Yisrael*, when they heard bad reports from the Spies, so is there a test for anyone who wants to enter *Eretz Yisrael* in order to live there. It will entail a test.

Let us think about what this test is – the test of trying to enter *Eretz Yisrael*, and the test for all those who are living in it.

THE UNIQUE SPIRITUAL QUALITIES OF ERETZ YISRAEL

The Gemara says that when Hashem was forming the body of Adam *HaRishon*, He formed the head from *Eretz Yisrael*, his body from Bavel, and all other body parts from all the other lands.¹ The main part – the head – was taken from *Eretz Yisrael*. Thus, *Eretz Yisrael* is the head, the most elite, of all lands.

It wasn't a coincidence that Adam's head was taken from *Eretz Yisrael* - it wasn't simply a matter of giving importance to the head because *Eretz Yisrael* is an important place. It wasn't simply because the most important part of the body, the head, had to be taken from an important land, *Eretz Yisrael*. Rather, the depth of this matter is because *Eretz Yisrael* is the head, by its very concept.

The mental faculties are in the head, and *Chazal* said that the “air of *Eretz Yisrael* makes one wise.” Just as the head contains the mental faculties, so does *Eretz Yisrael* reveal the true

¹ Talmud Bavli Sanhedrin 37a

mind of a person. But even more so, Hashem said “*Not like the land of Egypt which you were taken out from,*”² Egypt was irrigated by the Nile River, but *Eretz Yisrael* is irrigated by “rains from Heaven,” and it is the land which “*the eyes of Hashem your G-d are on, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year.*”³ Hashem watches over *Eretz Yisrael* with His “eyes,” so to speak.

Simply speaking, the difference between Egypt and *Eretz Yisrael* was that Egypt was irrigated by the Nile while *Eretz Yisrael* was irrigated from Heaven. But the deeper, clearer difference is because the land of Egypt had to be worked with sweat and toil, for it was cursed ever since Adam was banished from Gan Eden, whereas the land of *Eretz Yisrael* is reaped with *emunah*, by believing in Hashem. There are special agricultural laws of the Torah only in *Eretz Yisrael*, because the land of *Eretz Yisrael* is a different kind of land, which is cultivated not from hard work, but from believing in Hashem. Working the land in *Eretz Yisrael* is not simply effort like other kinds of work. It required only a bit of work, with the rest being completed by Hashem. Planting and harvesting in *Eretz Yisrael* was entirely run with Divine Providence. Anything grown in *Eretz Yisrael* is from the air of *Eretz Yisrael*, which brings wisdom with it. The special “fruits of *Eretz Yisrael*” which the land is praised with can only be a product of the special “air” of *Eretz Yisrael*.

THE SPIRIT OF FOLLY WHICH COUNTERS THE WISE AIR OF ERETZ YISRAEL

Chazal said that when a person sins, it is only because a “spirit of folly” enters him.⁴ This is true about all sins, but especially about sins committed in *Eretz Yisrael*. The test of the Spies, is also in every generation. Just as there is wisdom that comes from the special air of Divine Providence that fills *Eretz Yisrael*, so there is also an urge to follow their “spirit of folly”-one's evil inclination. The greatness in *Eretz Yisrael* is equally countered with a force of evil - a more powerful evil inclination. “The greater a person is than his friend, the greater his evil inclination.”⁵ A person living in *Eretz Yisrael* is living in the source land of spiritual consciousness and in the place where the air makes people wiser, so he is greater there than his friend living outside *Eretz Yisrael*.

² Deuteronomy 11:10-12

³ Ibid.

⁴ Talmud Bavli Sotah 2a

⁵ Talmud Bavli Succah 52a

A person living in *Eretz Yisrael* has greater access to wisdom that's inherent in the very air of *Eretz Yisrael*, opposed by the side of evil, a "spirit of folly," which can sway him in the opposite direction. "From from Tziyon comes forth Torah, and the word of Torah from Yerushalayim." ⁶ Wisdom, Torah, would come forth from the *Aron* in the *Kodesh Kodashim*. Countering all of this wisdom is "the spirit of folly." This was the depth of the test for the Spies. They were all great, important leaders who were known to be prestigious, but in the end, they fell into a "spirit of folly" that is just as strong as the wisdom found in *Eretz Yisrael*.

This is the depth of the test for every person. Every person has access to wisdom from the Torah, but every person can also be swayed after foolishness. *Chazal* said that a person doesn't sin unless a spirit of folly entered him, and there are two ways to understand this - a simple way and a deeper way. Simply speaking, it means that if a person would only settle his knowledge upon his heart, he would never sin, so if he sinned, it is because he never settled his knowledge on his heart. The *Ramchal* says in *Derech Eitz Chaim*, "If a person would really be afraid of what a sin is, he would not be able to sin." When a person sins, his knowledge of right and wrong leaves his mind, because it certainly isn't on his heart. But the deeper understanding of why a person sins due to the spirit of folly is because his thought process becomes swayed and crooked.

Eretz Yisrael contains an air that makes people wiser, and true Torah comes forth from *Eretz Yisrael*, and therefore *Eretz Yisrael* is also the best land with the best fruits, which is the physical byproduct. But corresponding to all of this is a certain "spirit of folly," which is the entire reason that a person sins. The spirit of folly causes a person's wisdom to leave him, where he becomes similar to an insane person, or a child, or anyone who lacks *daas*.

But even more so, the spirit of folly makes the mind crooked. *Rav Chaim Volozhiner* would say that the entire praise of the earlier generations is that they could think with upright reasoning. Without this upright thinking, one's thinking patterns have a spirit of folly. *Chazal* said, "The thinking of laymen is the opposite of *daas Torah*."⁷ Without a thinking process that is aligned with Torah, a person is not insane and lacking *daas*, he is rather a person with a crooked kind of *daas*, a *daas* that is opposite to *daas Torah*.

⁶ Isaiah 2:3

⁷ Choshen Mishpat 3 §13

A “spirit of folly” is a certain way of thinking that doesn’t follow the straight, upright thinking of the Torah. It is written, “*G-d made man upright, but they sought many calculations.*”⁸ With all kinds of calculations, one’s thinking becomes crooked, like the “thinking of the Serpent,” which has to crawl in a twisted manner.

Although there is great holiness in *Eretz Yisrael*, there is also a *kelipah*, a “peel that covers the fruit,” which can turn *Eretz Yisrael*, a place of wisdom, into a spirit of folly which reveals a crooked path, a way of thinking that is against the Torah’s thinking.

THE CROOKED THINKING OF THE EREV RAV

Hashem said that spies can be sent “according to your understanding / *daas*” – implying that the mission would be successful only if they went with the *daas* of Moshe.

The group of Egyptians called the “*Erev Rav*” (Mixed Multitude) left Egypt together with the Jewish people at the exodus. The *Erev Rav* is the embodiment of the ruined *daas*, the opposite of the holy *daas* of Moshe. As a hint, the word *Erev Rav* is equal in *gematria* to the word *daas*. The *Erev Rav* have an evil, impaired *daas* that counters the holy *daas* of Moshe. Their *daas* is crooked and “seeks many calculations.”

The Spies had the choice to either go with the holy *daas* of Moshe, or with the crooked *daas* of the Serpent. The test of sending the Spies was a test if they would choose to connect to the *daas* of Moshe. Had they done so, they would have seen the good in *Eretz Yisrael*, the special holy spiritual consciousness that is in *Eretz Yisrael*. But once when they veered from the *daas* of Moshe, they instead turned into messengers of the *Erev Rav* which caused *Klal Yisrael* to see everything from then onward through a crooked viewpoint. They saw a certain negative version of *Eretz Yisrael*- the way it simply appeared to their eyes. And that is what led to the tragedy of being unable to enter *Eretz Yisrael* and having to die in the desert.

Thus, entering *Eretz Yisrael* was a test if they would enter holy *daas*, the *daas* of Moshe, *daas Torah*, versus the ruined, crooked *daas*, the way the Serpent thinks – the *daas* of the *Erev Rav*. That was the test concerning the very first time they would enter *Eretz Yisrael*, in which they had left Egypt in order to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. It is the same test whenever one is coming to enter *Eretz Yisrael*, or when he is found in it.

⁸ Ecclesiastes 7:29

THE EREV RAV'S MOVEMENT OF MASS ALIYAH TO ERETZ YISRAEL

In the end of days as well, had they [and we] been *zocheh*, the entire Klal Yisrael would have returned to *Eretz Yisrael* in a holy manner, through “clouds of Heaven.” But they [and we] weren’t *zocheh* to this, and *Raboseinu* wrote [prophetically] that when we are not *zocheh* to be returned to *Eretz Yisrael* correctly, then part of *Klal Yisrael* will return there by being thrown out of the non-Jewish countries they live in. This is an entry into *Eretz Yisrael* that is not through the *daas* of Moshe, but through the opposite of this holy *daas*.

The *Gra*⁹ wrote, and Rav Elchonon Wasserman zt”l¹⁰ elaborated this, that at the end of exile, the “heads of the *Erev Rav*” will be the ones who are seemingly returning *Klal Yisrael* to *Eretz Yisrael*. Their leadership and their way of thinking is from the same source as the *daas* of the Serpent, which is crooked and which doesn’t follow the Torah.

Entering into *Eretz Yisrael* in the final days is due to the *Erev Rav*’s power which they are given in the final days. Certainly at the inner core of this it is all Divine Providence of Hashem, Who is watching over everything and Whose eyes are on *Eretz Yisrael*, and He is the One behind this entire movement. But Hashem is covered over! The *Erev Rav* acts like a garment that conceals Him. The *Erev Rav* are those who present themselves as the leaders of *Klal Yisrael* who are leading and running everything along, and they do everything through their impaired *daas* which is the opposite of the holy *daas* of Moshe.

When living in *Eretz Yisrael*, there is a big test. Firstly, one has to live with a level of holiness, because *Eretz Yisrael* is the place of holy spiritual consciousness. But there is also another test of living in *Eretz Yisrael*. Anyone who can see just a little bit is able to see that those who returned the Jewish people to *Eretz Yisrael*, are trying to re-educate the Jewish people by introducing all the foreign thinking and lifestyles of all the “enlightened, educated nations,” which is all the *daas* of the *Erev Rav*. They want to do this until they will ‘sink the whole ship’.

If a person only has a superficial perspective, he just sees one part and another part but he doesn’t connect it with the bigger picture. For example, he will think that this entire movement of mass *aliyah* to *Eretz Yisrael* is needed so that everyone will have a livelihood.

⁹ Gra: Tikunei HaZohar 41, sefer Even Shelaimah 11

¹⁰ Sefer Kovetz He’aros

But if someone has true vision, he sees and understands clearly that this is entirely the *daas* of the Serpent.

It was the same test given to the Spies when entering *Eretz Yisrael*. The same test which was endured by the first generation of the Jewish people is once again happening in the final generation. Of course, the variables have changed. We are not in a physical desert now, we don't have the Spies, and we don't have Moshe sending them for us. But the inner variables of that very same test are once again here.

CHOOSING WHICH SIDE WE WANT TO BE ON

When we understand the depth of the test, we can see that we have a choice in front of us.

We have the choice to become connected to those “who had a different spirit with him,”¹¹ Yehoshua and Calev, who remained as messengers of Moshe. Yehoshua would not leave the tent of his teacher Moshe, and Kalev connected himself to the *Avos* by praying at their graves in Hevron. They remained connected to their roots (Yehoshua to Moshe, the root of Torah, and Calev to the *Avos*, the roots of Klal Yisrael). Either way, Yehoshua and Calev connected themselves to their root which enabled them to enter *Eretz Yisrael* and find the wise air of *Eretz Yisrael* instead of the *daas* of the Serpent.

They weren't looking to become connected to the inhabitants there, who belonged to the seven nations dwelling there. They had no desire to be like the nations. They only wanted to separate from the nations. So too, to the extent that we are connected with the thinking of the Torah, we are separated from the nations.

But, *chas v'shalom*, that a person connects himself with the ways of thinking of the *Erev Rav*, to this modern-day “Haskalah” that is penetrating into the homes of Klal Yisrael! If one is identifying himself with the thinking of the *Erev Rav*, all under the pretext of the need for *parnassah* (livelihood), then the thinking of the *Erev Rav* will penetrate into his mind more and more, and then those Jews will feel small and swallowed up by the nations. The nations of the world are large in their numbers, and they are like the fearsome giants that the Spies saw in *Eretz Yisrael*.

¹¹ Shemos 14:24

When these words ring true, we can understand the depth of the test which we have now in the end of days. We are being tested if we will live a life of holiness and to become totally separated from the ruined *daas* which surrounds us and which is amidst us.

Of the future, the prophet says that a “*new Torah will come forth from Me.*”¹² The Redemption will be revealed speedily in our days and the *daas* of Hashem will fill the world. Who will be *zocheh* to that new Torah? Who will be *zocheh* to the *daas* of Hashem then which will fill the world?

If one’s way of thinking remained clean and pure and he didn’t allow his thinking to resemble the thinking of the nations of the world and he didn’t allow the thinking of the *Erev Rav* to penetrate his mind and steal his *neshamah*— if he will put up a strong wall and a total separation between his mind and the way of thinking of the nations, and he will fill his thoughts only with Torah and of Hashem’s conduct - then his mind becomes a vessel to contain the new Torah when Mashiach comes, the *daas* of Hashem. But if one’s mind was dirtied with the thinking of the nations, “a wind can come and uproot him.” How will he the light of the future, of holy spiritual consciousness, shine in such a mind...?

IN CONCLUSION

May it be Hashem's will that the *Beis HaMikdash* be built speedily in our days, and may He give us a portion in His Torah, which we ask for daily. In order for that request to be true, we must separate totally from the ways of thinking of the nations around us, from all of this pseudo-wisdom that surrounds us from all sides, in all of its different titles and masks. We must remain clean, pure, and holy, connected deeply to the wisdom of the holy Torah, which is the revelation of Hashem’s wisdom. “He and His will are one, He And His wisdom are one.” When we remain connected to the Creator’s wisdom, as revealed through His holy Torah, then we are connected to Him and we are transformed into a vessel to contain the light of the future Torah that Hashem will reveal with the coming of Mashiach.

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[We have purposely left in all repetitions to understand clearly the points the Rav, Shlit" a is expressing]

¹² Isaiah 51:4