The Blessing of 'Matziv G'vul Almana'

בָּרוּךְ מָצִיָּו גְּוַעַל אֲלַמָּנָה.

For 2000 years, many Halachot laid dormant, waiting, only to be rediscovered, discussed and debated with the miraculous return of the Jewish People to their ancestral homeland, and the dramatic establishment of the State of Israel. Among them is a lesser known blessing: 'Baruch matziv g'vul almana.'

Our Sages teach (B'rachot 58b): "One who sees houses of Israel settled, says: Baruch matziv g'vul almana - Blessed is He who establishes the boundary of the widow." But this blessing, based on a Mishlei 15:25, is the subject of much controversy.

Rashi comments (ad Loc., s.v. Baruch), that this blessing is to be said when one sees a settlement like "the settlement during the Second Temple". According to this interpretation, the blessing is only relevant inside of the Land of Israel.

The Rif, however, has a different version of the Gemara, which begins, "One who sees synagogues..." (B'rachot 43b. See also Meiri to B'rachot 58b). According to this interpretation, the blessing should be made even outside the Land of Israel, when one sees a new synagogue in its full glory.

Rabbeinu Yerucham has yet another version, with the language of the blessing being, "Baruch meishiv g'vul almana - Blessed is He who returns the boundary of the widow" (Toldot Adam v'Chava 13:2). This formulation would support Rashi's interpretation, stressing that this blessing is made upon a return to the Land.

The Beit Yosef (OC 224) and Maharsha (B'rachot 58b) rule that the blessing is only recited when the Beit HaMikdash is standing, as Jewish homes can only truly be considered 'settled' and no longer in mourning like 'widows' when there is no persecution, and the Nation is restored with its Holy Temple rebuilt.

But the Bach (OC 224) disagrees, and writes that the blessing does not require the Mikdash to be built to be recited, "for if so, it [the Talmud] should have stated, 'One who sees the Beit HaMikdash', rather it is to be said upon all homes of Israel when they are settled after their days of being persecuted like a widow..." According to the Bach, this is Rashi's intent by invoking the settlement during the Second Temple period. As is well known, the Land of Israel was settled years before the construction of the Second Temple was complete. (More on
this period in Jewish History in next week's column).

The Shulchan Aruch (OC 224:10) rules in accord with Rashi, and writes that this blessing be said upon seeing Jewish homes in Israel, settled like in the days of the Second Temple Period.

But due to the many doubts concerning where and when this blessing should be said, many authorities rule that the blessing should not be said "B'sheim u'Malchut", with Hashem's name (See Pri Megadim, Mishbetzot Zahav, OC 224, s.v. Haro'eh).

The Mishna Berura records that the custom is not say this blessing when seeing homes, but rather when seeing a synagogue in its glory (OC 224:14. See also Kaf HaChayim OC 224:35). In fact, the custom in many communities is to recite the blessing when dedicating a new synagogue (See T'shuvot Yehuda Ya'aleh, YD 1:277).

The Aruch HaShulchan (OC 224:7) writes that the custom is not to recite this blessing at all due to the various opinions and doubts, and invokes the principle of "Safek b'rachot l'hakeil", we are lenient and refrain from reciting a blessing when we are in doubt.

But with the return of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel in the 19th and 20th centuries, and following the founding of the State, there was renewed interest in reviving this blessing.

It is recorded that Rav Shmuel Salant recited the blessing when visiting Petach Tikvah for the first time. The students of Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook report that he was adamant about this blessing, and would recite it whenever he visited a new settlement. In his public lectures, Rav Tzvi Yehuda was critical of those who were hesitant in reciting the blessing, as he saw it as a lack of faith on their part.

Rav Chaim David HaLevi, who served as Chief Rabbi of Rishon L'Tzion from 1951-1973 and Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv from 1973-1998, writes that following the establishment of the State of Israel, "Hashem has blessed us and we live in our land under Jewish sovereignty, the Jewish settlement is 'houses of Israel, settled'..." He continues, "...one may recite this blessing B'sheim u'Malchut" (Asei L'cha Rav 4:5).

Many contemporary authorities today rule that one may say the blessing upon seeing a new settlement in Israel, or one that he has not seen in thirty days. A friend living in Har B'racha, for example, reports that when there are Shabbat guests visiting the yishuv, they are often requested to make the blessing.

May we continue to see our boundaries 'established' and increased, with the return of 'her children to their borders' - Amein. ☝️