

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*

This past Shabbat I had the opportunity to spend Shabbat in the Old City, in close proximity to the Kotel. I was immensely moved by the thousands and thousands of Jews, of all persuasions, who came throughout the day to daven at the place from which the Sh'china has never budged, **LO ZAZA SH'CHINA**. Equally noticeable were the many non-Jewish visitors who came, day and night, to experience the Kotel and try to make sense of our unique attraction to the Western Wall.

A verse from the start of this week's Parsha is a good starting point for an examination of this question. In Vayikra 26:3-11 we read a list of B'rachot we will be awarded with if we carefully safeguard the Torah - "if you walk in My statutes and keep My mitzvot..." We are promised peace and prosperity; economic, military and diplomatic success, all this coupled together with marital and domestic bliss.

In verse 11 the Torah promises that **V'NATATI MISHKANI B'TOCH'CHEM** - "I will set my Mishkan amongst you..." The S'forno (1475-1550) emphasizes that ideally the Sh'chinah resides within us - within the people of Israel - and not in any specific geographical locale. This message is amplified in the next verse (Vayikra 26:12) where the Torah tells us: **V'HITHALACHTI B'TOCH'CHEM**, "And I will walk among you, and I will be your G-d, and you shall be MY people."

Continuing his previous line of thought, the S'forno points out that the Torah does not write "I will walk" (Va'et-halech), but rather uses the Hitpa'el form of the verb (Hit-halachti). This, he claims, hints to a reality where G-d willingly follows and accompanies us: back and forth, to and fro - wherever the sanctified Jew will find himself - this is where G-d will be - amongst us - B'etocheinu.

This understanding of the Torah's blessing could seemingly lead to the conclusion that there is no need to visit the Kotel, or any other sacred space. After all, the Sh'china, the divine presence, need not be sought after in a specific place, the Sh'china is B'tocheinu, sanctity follows man wherever he goes. Extending this idea further, one could conceivably downplay the centrality of the Holy Land as well. Indeed, Jewish thinkers advocating for a universalistic worldview have been much taken by this S'forno. Those who view as anathema the Torah's usual emphasis on a holy land, a sanctified temple or a sacred wall welcome the belief that holiness resides within man - B'tocheinu - not between walls and within stone.

This conclusion, however, would be terribly misguided. It is true that the S'forno consistently stresses the universalistic message of the Torah, [S'forno explains terms such as "Mamlechet Kohanim" and "Am Segula" in a universalistic vein: "You shall be a segula, because you will be a nation of kohanim to understand and teach the entire human race so that they all may call in the name of G-d to serve Him together" - S'forno on Sh'mot 19:6. Historically, the S'forno's willingness to teach Hebrew to the Christian Humanist,

Johannes Reuchlin seems to be his own modest contribution to bring about the universal vision of "Ki Beiti Beit Tefilla Yikarei L'chol Ha'amim (Yeshayahu 56:7)].

However, this universalistic, and humanistic, approach did not erase his nationalistic fervor. That there is no inherent theoretical contradiction between the two, can be empirically demonstrated by pointing to a modern day model. Rav Aharon Soloveitchik zt"l embodied fervent Zionism coupled together with passionate humanistic tendencies. Rav Aharon was noted for his regard for the welfare of others, including those at a great distance both culturally and geographically. During the 1960s the Nigerian government was dealing with secessionists as part of the Biafran civil war. Famine struck hard, and as multitudes were reported to be starving. Rav Aharon Soloveitchik was deeply troubled. Rav Gifter zt"l is quoted as having remarked in admiration, that "It is not just that Rav Aharon zt"l discussed the situation in Biafra, it is that he was the only Rosh Yeshiva who heard about Biafra."

Returning to the words of our Parsha, it seems clear, that the S'forno quoted above relates primarily to an Utopian and Post-Messianic era. In the distant future, one can imagine a time when Hashem will "walk amongst us" in the sense described above, perhaps obviating the need for sacred space. Nevertheless, practically speaking this debate is an academic one of little immediate consequence. [This is somewhat reminiscent of the philosophical discussion whether the command to build a Mishkan preceded the Golden Calf or arrived as a result of the sin. The ramifications are

immense: Do we look upon the human attempt to come close to the Almighty via the designation of a sacred space as a B'dieved concession to human weakness, or as an ideal situation? The S'forno seems to adopt the former approach. (similar to Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi in the Kuzari 1:97 and Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim 3:45, 3:32)].

In our present situation most of us are in need of a simpler, more physical way of connecting to the divine. In the here and now, we can only approach the Sh'china via sacred time and place, and G-d's presence can only be "seen" during the Aliya L'Regel to the Temple in Jerusalem. It is true that even today "Tzadikei Elyon", as the S'forno refers to them, merit having G-d Mit-halech B'tocham. Indeed, as I write these words on the 37th night of the Omer - it is the Yahrtzeit of the first Husiyatener Rebbe. (My Grandfather, Rav Shalom Shachne Roness, was a Husiyatener Chassid who immigrated to Canada from the Ukraine in the 1920s.) In a eulogy written after the Rebbe's passing, the words of the S'forno were mentioned, with the claim that "The Sh'china rested upon him" as he was truly one of the "Tzadikei Elyon". However, this is not applicable to the rest of us. As my experience at the Kotel clearly shows, the rest of us still need sacred space in order to experience a sense of communion with the Divine.

As Yom Yerushalayim approaches, we repeat the words of the Psalmist: "Omdot Hayu Ragleinu Bisharayayich Yerushalayim" (Tehillim 122,2). The Radak explains, that the first Olim L'Regel reaching Jerusalem would wait at the city gates, welcoming the others behind them. We too, the Olim who have already made Israel our home - call out

"Beit Hashem Neilech" - eagerly
expecting the arrival of all our brethren
from the Diaspora!

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