

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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Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin zt"l points out that Chag Shavuot has two contradictory elements: On the one hand, the festival commemorates the giving of the Torah in the Desert of Sinai. As such, the Chag evokes memories of a desert landscape - desolate and bare where nothing grows - unless by miracle such as was the case at Sinai...

On the other hand, Shavuot is also Chag HaBikurim - when the first fruits of the Land are brought to the Beit HaMikdash in recognition and gratitude to the Almighty for the manifold bounty of the holy land.

Desert and desolation versus Bikurim representing the cultivation and productivity of the Land .

These two disparate themes can be connected via the Land of Israel itself. At times the land is plentiful, while during other periods of time, the very same land represents the opposite extreme. It is as if the Land itself is able to discern who is domiciled on it. When the Chosen

People come to the Chosen Land - and behave accordingly - the land responds in kind. If the Jewish nation resides in the Land and observes the mitzvot, the Land flourishes. When the Land is not inhabited by its people and other nations reside here, it turns into a wasteland. Down through the ages writers, poets and even gentile clergymen have commented on this remarkable phenomenon. The Gemara in Sanhedrin (98a) quotes Rabbi Abba as having taught that: "There is no more manifest sign of redemption (greater sign of the end of days) than this: 'But you, mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to my people Israel for they are nearly there'" (Yechezkel 36:8). Rashi explains that when the Land of Israel bears its crops in abundance the end of days will be near - we have been granted no clearer sign than this. Contemporary events seem to attest to this fact. The Land seems to flourish only where Jews reside. When Land is handed to the control of the Arabs, the Land turns into a desert - witness Gush Katif.

Having discussed the significance of the physical desolation, or plenty, of the Land, I should like now to focus on the spiritual desolation the Land had experienced for so long. When

the Ramban arrived in the city of Jerusalem and claimed a vacant property for a Shul, he describes the difficulty he had collecting a minyan on a Shabbat morning. In order to meet the needed quorum he had to round up people from distant surrounding areas. How far have we come today! Every city, town, and many neighborhoods, throughout the length and breadth of the country host dozens of Minyanim every day!

Dr. Arie Morgenstern writes that a major turning point in the history of Eretz Yisrael today, was the Aliya of Talmidei HaGRA, who started coming to Eretz Yisrael in the early 1800s in the hope that human activity would hasten the coming of the Mashiach. [One of the first families to arrive in 1809 was the Rivlin family. Israel's former President Reuven Rivlin is one of their direct descendants]. They were thwarted in their every move by the Muslim Wakf, and were not granted authorization to build a synagogue in Jerusalem. Therefore, many of them chose to establish themselves in the city of Tzfat. A catastrophic earthquake which struck Tzfat in 1837 destroyed the town dashing their dreams. Subsequently, many of the same Talmidim chose to return to Jerusalem, and in 1858 Moshe Montefiore finally obtained authorization from the

Turkish sultan to build what was to become known as the Churva Synagogue. By the year 1860 Jews had already become a majority of Jerusalem's population. (Minhagei HaGRA became established as the predominant custom of Jerusalem's Jews. One of the more familiar minhagim is not to don Tefillin on Chol Hamoed (Bi'ur HaGRA, Orach Chayim 31:2). Looking back at the history of the Aliya of the GRA's disciples, from our vantage point today, we can see how the decisions made by a relatively small number of people sparked the growth of Yerushalayim and the development of Eretz Yisrael in its entirety.

To you, thinking of making Aliya from Atlanta or Monsey, Montreal or Sydney, I say: Take the plunge today! Your descendants will look upon your Aliya as a momentous turning point in your family's history! 🏠👉