

CHIZUK & IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

by **Rabbi Yerachmiel Roness**

Ramat Shiloh, Beit Shemesh

VAYEISHEV 5777 (2016)

These lines are being written on the eve of the 19th of Kislev which celebrates the "Rosh Hashana of Chassidism". This is the term used by Lubavitcher Chassidim to describe the day Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi (author of the Tanya) was released from the Peter-Paul Prison in Petersburg, where he had been imprisoned based on trumped-up charges that his teachings threatened the imperial authority of the Czar. This date is relevant as I would like to quote the words of the Baal HaTanya regarding the first Pasuk of this week's Parsha:

"And Yaakov dwelt B'ERETZ M'GUREI AVIV, in the land in which his father had sojourned; in the Land of Kna'an" (B'reishit 37:1).

Rav Shneuer Zalman explained that ever since the Jews were exiled, the word M'GURIM can assume one of three possible meanings: To dwell or to have lodging, to feel fear and trepidation (as in: VAYAGOR MO'AV), or the state of being a GER, a stranger.

Wherever Jews found themselves in Galut, they felt themselves as

strangers in a land not their own. Oftentimes they feared the authorities, and were uncertain where exactly they were permitted to dwell. (During other periods in our history the boundaries of the designated area, or Ghetto, were too clearly delineated...) The boundaries of the "Pale of Settlement" defining the areas within the Russian Empire, where Jewish settlement was authorized, varied according to the changing colonial needs of the Russian Empire, not with what was good for the Jewish People. At times, Jews living in rural areas were forced to move to towns and were there confined, and prohibited from moving around without explicit authorization. This concentration of the Jewish population within the "Pale of Settlement" made them easy targets for pogroms.

In fact, in the year 1920, my grandfather's town, Volotzchesk, was invaded by Cossaks who pillaged and plundered the town. My late father z"l, was a toddler lying in his crib, as a Cossack struck him in the back with a sword. My father was left to die, but, miraculously survived. To his dying day a long scar ran down the length of his back bearing witness to the events.

Going back to the verse under discussion, we find that Eretz Yisrael is described in two ways: ERETZ

M'GURAI AVIV- the Land in which his father dwelled, and the Land of Kna'an.

The Targum Yonatan translates **M'GUREI AVIV** as **MOSHAVOT AVIV** - his father's dwellings. Understandably, one prefers to dwell where one's ancestors have lived, as the Radak says "It was where Avraham and Yitzchak had dwelled."

The second description of the Land as "Eretz Kna'an" provides us with the additional reason Yaakov chose to live there: This was not only the place where his ancestors lived, but it was, in the words of Ibn Ezra, **ERETZ HANIVCHERET** - the divinely Chosen Land.

Jews deciding to stay in the Galut may be choosing to remain in **ERETZ M'GURAI AVIV**, the land within which their parents were born and lived. However, by not coming to Eretz Yisrael, they are turning their backs on **ERETZ HANIVCHERET** - the Chosen Land.

Having opened with a reference to the Baal HaTanya let me conclude with a message borne out of a story brought down by Nechama Leibowitz in her **HORA'AT M'FARSHEI HATORA** (p. 232):

During the time he was imprisoned, Rav Shneur Zalman was posed the following question by the inquisitive and biblically literate jailer tending to

his needs: "How are we to understand the fact that G-d, the all-knowing, turns to Adam asking him: **AYEKA** - 'Where are you?'" The Rav answered the jailer, "Do you believe that the Scriptures are eternal and that every era, every generation, and every individual is included therein?" "Indeed, I believe this to be true", answered the jailer. "Well then", said Rav Shneur Zalman, "in every era, God asks every person, 'Where are you in your world? So many of the years and of the days allotted to you have already passed - what have you achieved? How far have you gotten in your world?' You have already lived forty-six long years, How far along are you?" When the chief jailer heard his exact age mentioned by the Rav he stood up shaken, placed his hand on the Rav's shoulder, and cried.

G-d had no need whatsoever to ask Adam where he was, it was Adam who needed to be asked...

If I may be somewhat presumptive, I would add, that I find Rav Shneur Zalman's explanation to be highly relevant to many aspects of a person's life - including the question of Aliya.

The Shechina, speaking to us from Makom HaMikdash in Jerusalem, addresses each and every individual, searchingly asking: **AYEKA?** Where are you? Where are you in this world? Have you considered Aliya or like

Adam do you run to run to hide when asked this question? 🏠👉

These weekly words of Torah wisdom can be found in my recently published book "Eretz Yisrael and Aliyah in the weekly Parsha". It can be ordered by calling 052-336-0553 or by ordering it on Amazon