

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Matos/Masei 5769

And you shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I dwell, for I am Hashem who dwells in the midst of the Children of Israel (35:34)

In the blessing after cake, fruit or wine we say, “And build Jerusalem, the holy city, speedily in our days, and bring us up to its midst, and make us joyful in its building, and let us eat of its fruit and be sated from its goodness, and may we bless You for it in holiness and purity.” The Tur Orach Chaim 208, quoting the Sefer Mitzvos Katan 151, writes that it is incorrect to say the words “and let us eat of its fruit and be sated from its goodness” because we must desire Eretz Yisroel for spiritual reasons, not for the sake of its fruit and its goodness.

However, the Bach defends the commonly accepted text of the blessing as follows: “The holiness of Eretz Yisroel, which descends to it from the holiness of the heavenly Eretz Yisroel, is felt even in its fruits, which derive nourishment from the holiness of the Divine Presence that lives in Eretz Yisroel. This Divine Presence is the reason why the Torah warns at the end of Parshas Masei, ‘Do not defile the land in which you live, in which I dwell, for I am Hashem who dwells in the midst of the Children of Israel.’ G-d warns us: If you defile Eretz Yisroel, the defilement will extend even into its fruits which derive nourishment from it.

“Nowadays,” continues the Bach, “the Divine Presence has already departed from the midst of the land. G-d says: My Presence, which once dwelt literally in the earth of Eretz Yisroel, has departed due to the defilement with which you have defiled it. As a result, I took My Presence away from the midst of the Children of Israel. Until now they were the sanctuary of Hashem, in whose midst the Divine Presence was literally dwelling. But now that they eat from fruits that derive their nourishment from the defilement of Eretz Yisroel, the Divine Presence goes out, because when the defilement enters with the eating of the fruits, the holiness goes out of the Jewish people.”

“Therefore, it makes sense for us to insert into the blessing the words, ‘and let us eat of its fruit and be sated from its goodness’ because through eating the fruits of Eretz Yisroel we will derive nourishment from the holiness and purity of the Divine Presence, and we will be sated with the goodness of the Divine Presence.”

We see an amazing concept in this Bach. The difference between Eretz Yisroel during exile and Eretz Yisroel at the time of the redemption is not that during exile Eretz Yisroel does not produce fruits and

at the time of the redemption it will produce fruits. It produces fruits at all times, but during exile the land is defiled, its fruits are defiled and so those who eat it become defiled, resulting in the departure of the Divine Presence from them. When the redemption arrives, G-d's holiness will once again fill the land, its fruits will be holy and those who eat them will be nourished from holiness. Thus the Smak's objection is unfounded, because when we say this blessing we truly are praying for the spiritual aspect of Eretz Yisroel.

Many Zionists quote the Gemara in Sanhedrin 98a as a proof that their state is a part of the redemption process. The Gemara says, "You have no more revealed end [of exile] than this: 'And you, mountains of Israel, give forth your branches and bear your fruit to my people Israel' (Yechezkel 36:8)." Rashi says, "When Eretz Yisroel gives forth its fruit generously, then the end will draw near, and you have no more revealed end."

We have already quoted (Parshas Bechukosai) the Maharsha, who says that the Gemara refers to the land miraculously producing new fruit every day, or at least exceptionally large and abundant fruit like in Temple times (see Kesubos 112a). Regular fruit is not a sign of anything, and indeed the land produced regular fruit throughout the centuries of exile. This is implied by Rashi, who says that the sign is only if it produces fruit "generously." Now, in the words of the Bach, we find further confirmation of the fact that Eretz Yisroel does produce fruit during exile, and the fundamental difference between the fruits of exile and the fruits of redemption is a spiritual one.

This is further born out by the Midrash Eicha, Pesicha 34: "Rabbi Zeira said: How audacious is Eretz Yisroel! For it still produces fruit [during exile]. And why does it produce fruit? Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi discussed this. One said: Because they fertilize it. The other said: Because they turn over its soil." Hashem does not wish to alter the natural order of the world, and the natural order of the world is that when one plants and puts in the proper effort, the seeds sprout and grow.

Similarly, the Gemara in Avodah Zarah 54b says, "If one steals a measure of wheat and plants it in the ground, by all rights it should not grow. But the world follows its normal course, and the fools who sinned will be punished."

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