

V'ZOS HA'BRACHA
ETERNAL VISION
Hashem—the King of Israel

A

An Unusual Name

“Va’yehi bishurun Melech b’hisasef roshei am yachad shivtei Yisrael. There is a king in Yeshurun when the heads of the people gather together with the tribes of Israel” (Devarim 33:5). This refers to Hashem, the King of kings, Who is found among the Jewish people.

Shem Mishmuel raises a simple question: Why is the name Yeshurun used here instead of our usual name, Bnei Yisrael?

We find the name Yeshurun used in two additional instances in the Torah. In Parshas Ha’azinu the Torah writes, *“Va’yishman Yeshurun va’yivat.* Yeshurun became fat and kicked”—that is, rebelled against God. The other appearance of Yeshurun is also in V’zos Habracha. The Torah says, *“Ein kaEil Yeshurun.* There is no one like the God of Yeshurun.” Why is the name Yeshurun used instead of other names in these three places?

Straddling Two Ships

The Sifri comments on the words of the first *pasuk* we quoted, “There is a king in Yeshurun when all the tribes of Israel are united.” When the Jewish people is united in groups, they create a situation that allows Hashem to be King. The Sifri continues with a *pasuk* from Tehillim, “*Ha’boneh ba’shamayim ma’alosav, va’agudaso al eretz yesada*. God builds His high places, in heaven, and His group is founded on the earth.” What does this puzzling *pasuk* refer to?

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai says that this is analogous to a person who buys two ships, ties them together, and builds a mansion on top that straddles the two of them. As long as these two ships are together, the mansion stands. However, once the two ships separate from one another, the mansion collapses. When the Jewish people do the will of God (*osin retzono shel Makom*), then the palace stands. God builds His high places in heaven. This palace is the palace of the King and the Jewish people inhabit it. When the people do the will of Hashem, that palace is in heaven. But if they don’t do His will, then the end of the *pasuk* applies—“*va’agudaso al eretz yesada*,”—it is found on the ground, not in heaven.

This is puzzling. The end of the *pasuk* says His group is found in the world. It doesn’t sound critical of the Jews. In fact, it calls these people “*agudaso*, His collective group.” It sounds like they are on earth with the blessing of God. So why does Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai say it refers to people who are not doing Hashem’s will?

Shem Mishmuel asks another question. The Sifri seems to focus on the unity of the Jewish people in his commentary on the beginning of this *parsha*. “*Vayehi bi’Yeshurun Melech b’hisasef roshei am*. God is king when the people are together.” Jewish unity is a founding principle for Hashem to be King of Israel. You can’t have a king without a people, and when the people are united, they function as a nation. But, what about *tzaddikim*? What is the role

of righteous individuals? The *pasuk* and Midrash here discuss the function of the collective. But what, if any, is the role of individual righteous people? What can the individual accomplish? And what can the collective of Jews together accomplish?

C

One Nation Under God

Shem Mishmuel explains that a king requires a nation. A *tzaddik* is indeed a great Jew. He has a special connection with Hashem. But he cannot be the foundation of the kingdom of Hashem. A king needs more than a few individuals. He must have a nation. Only the Jewish people, the nation of Hashem, can create the foundation of His kingdom. In this regard, the role of the *tzaddik* is secondary.

What is the difference whether Am Yisrael is doing God's will or not? The foundation of the *malchus* of Hashem is that the individuals function together as a people. This happens when we are united. When we are not, our nationality falls apart.

Most nations, except for the nation of Israel, are rooted in their land. The French are in the land of France, Americans live in the United States, and Russians come from Russia. Israel is a unique nation. For 1900 years after we were exiled from our land, we did not live in the Land of Israel. But we were still Am Yisrael. The Jewish nation, unlike others, is not defined by territory. Land is not necessary for us to be a nation. We were born as a nation in a desert. Even in Egypt, before we left, we were a nation through our common suffering. Our shared experience brought us together.

This Sifri is saying that a nation must have a king, someone to lead the people. The Jewish people has a King; our leader is Hashem. "*Va'yehi bi'Yeshurun Melech.*" He is our king—if we are a nation. What makes us a nation? Not territory and, apparently, not even keeping the Torah. What is the factor that Hashem

considers, when evaluating whether or not He can be called King of this nation? He looks to see if we are an *aguda*, a collective unit bound together. When you meet another Jew and you feel brotherhood, then you and he are part of the same Jewish nation and God is your King.

D

Mind Power

If, God forbid, we are not united, then our King is not with us. Here is a fascinating and incredible point. Sometimes, God puts His palace in the sky, and sometimes, on the earth. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai says, when people are united and fulfilling the Torah, then the palace of the King, where the people find themselves, too, is in heaven. We become a spiritual entity. When we are not united, the palace is on the ground, with us.

The Avnei Nezer says this is a function of our will. A person is where his mind is. The Gemara in Eiruv 49 says when someone sets up an *eiruv techumin* for Shabbos, he doesn't have to physically be in that location. On Friday afternoon, he can think, "That tree, 500 *amos* from here, will be my Shabbos dwelling." This *halacha* depends completely on where his mind is, not on the location of his body. So too, if a person's mind is in Israel then spiritually, psychologically, and emotionally he is there. Conversely, a person could physically be in Israel, but if his mind is outside of the land, then he's not really there.

When the Jewish people are united, and we want to do God's will, then He is our King and we are in heaven. This is how we reside in the palace above in heaven, which is the palace of the verse, "*ha'boneh ba'shamyim ma'alosav*. God builds His high places in heaven" (Amos 9:6). In the second half of the *pasuk*, which refers to when we aren't doing God's will, "*agudasam al eretz yesada*"—

we are also in a palace of Hashem. However, it is not the illustrious palace in heaven, but rather here on earth.

When the two ships separate, there is no more palace. But if we remain united, at least then we will have Hashem's palace with us in this world. We will be in this world with Hashem—even if we are not doing His will!

“*Va'yehi bi'Yeshurun melech b'hisasef rashei am.*” The key is *b'hisasef*, that people are unified. The Jewish people is certainly supposed to do God's will. But even if we don't, as long as we are united, we will still have Hashem's kingship in this world.

E

Return to Israel

This reminds me of the Zionist movement and the State of Israel. Right after the Holocaust, the Jewish people were very united. They all felt that they needed a country, and believed that they had to come together to achieve this goal. This may have been the first time in 1900 years that there was such a national consensus. There were a few fringe opinions who differed, but overall most agreed that we must have a state. My Rebbe Rav Soloveitchik asked, “When did the great fight between *chassidim* and *misnagdim* come to an end?” (There had been a split in the religious community for 200 years.) The Rav answered, “It ended in Auschwitz. The Jewish people realized that we needed to be united.” Post Holocaust, there was a tremendous unity among the Jewish people. This produced the State of Israel.

However, unfortunately, we were still not *osim retzono shel Makom*. There were many Jews, even a majority, who did not keep the Torah, including Shabbos and kosher. The unity did not produce a *teshuva* movement. The creation of the State of Israel was and is a tremendous historical development. Jews returned *en*

masse to Eretz Yisrael. But it did not become heaven on earth; the messianic era did not begin.

This was what Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai calls *agudaso al eretz yesada*, founding a basis for God's kingship and His presence in this world. To get to the *shamayim* heavenly level, we need *osim retzono shel Makom*, to do His holy will as it is expressed in the Torah.

F

Yeshurun

Now we will explain the word Yeshurun. In Shmuel II, the Metzudas Tzion explains that the letter *nun* at the end of a word means something smaller than the regular word would mean. In Hebrew, when a *nun* stands at the end of the word, it implies diminution. It reduces the word. For example, the word *katan* has a *nun* at the end. It means a child. *Ketantan* with an extra *nun* means a tiny baby.

“*Yeshurun*” comes from the word *yashar*, which means straight. “*Yeshurun*” means this people are essentially straight, but a little bit crooked. They are not exactly as straight as could be. Nonetheless, Hashem is still the king of Israel because His people are united. Even when we are not keeping the Torah, Hashem is still our King.

G

The Role of the King

A king makes and enforces laws. The king also supervises the nation and assures that the country functions according to its laws. He is in charge of making things happen. When we say Hashem is our *Melech*, it implies a certain relationship. He is the chief

executive. Hashem devotes a special focus of His towards His people. He, of course, supervises the whole world, but not as directly as He supervises His people, the Jews. When we say Hashem is our King, we mean that He shows special concern for His nation.

This is a great lesson. Hashem himself, the King of kings, creator and manager of everything in this world, focuses especially on the Jewish people. He makes things happen in the world according to His system that He set up for the Jewish people. This is a special type of *hashgacha*, supervision. It is a special *bracha* that we have His unique concern for our welfare.

When we think about this we should realize how important it is for us to have Jewish unity, even when people are not doing the *mitzvos* of the Torah. The concept of *melech* requires us to be united—*aguda achas*—with all Jews, no matter what their level of practice.

There are three times the Torah uses the word *Yeshurun*: “*Va’yehi bi’Yeshurun melech;*” “*Ein ka’Eil Yeshurun;*” and “*Va’yishman Yeshurun va’yivat.*”

“*Ein ka’Eil Yeshurun*” emphasizes the point that for us there is nobody like Hashem. He is loyal to us even when we are not loyal to Him. The Jewish people is basically a good people, but we have a lot of temptations. According to Chassidus, we also face evil forces arrayed against us that try to send us down the wrong path. It is not easy to stay *yashar*. We are *Yeshurun*, we are a small version of straight, sort of straight, due to the temptations of the *yeitzer*. But there is no one like Hashem. The other *pasuk* also states clearly that the Jewish people became fat and rebelled against Hashem. Still, Hashem remained loyal to them, as the Gemara says in Maseches Kiddushin 36. Rabbi Meir says, “Even when the Bnei Yisrael don’t do Hashem’s will they are still the children of Hashem.” We always have a connection. And to maintain that connection with our *Melech*, we must all be connected to one another.

Connection and Vision

Let us now analyze another concept in the *parsha* from the Shem Mishmuel.

Moshe had a great desire to go into the Land of Israel. But when he requested entry, Hashem denied his request. Rashi explains that Hashem partially granted Moshe's request. "You wanted to see the land, Moshe. I will show it to you." The Torah tells us that Hashem showed him the land. It even specifies what parts of the land Moshe saw.

However, Maseches Sota 14 says that Moshe wanted to go into the land because he wanted to fulfill the many *mitzvos* that a person can't perform in *chutz la'aretz*, including separating *trumos* and *ma'aseros*, *yishuv ha'aretz*, and *binyan hamikdash*. So how did Hashem console Moshe by saying he could look at the land? Looking doesn't accomplish any of these *mitzvos*!

Moshe's Quality—Eternity

Moshe Rabbeinu is the personification of the Torah. The Torah is *nitzchi* (eternal), so Moshe, the prophet of the Torah, is eternal as well. Even until the very last day of his life, he was not weak. He was as energetic as a young man because he had this eternal quality of the Torah about him. Whatever Moshe did had an eternal effect. In Yoma 72, the Gemara says that since the Mishkan of the desert was built by Moshe, it was never destroyed. It was taken down and hidden in one of the underground tunnels under the Beis Hamikdash. Moshe Rabbeinu is forever.

Moshe saw the *mitzvos ha'tluyos ba'aretz*, the *mitzvos* performed in the Land of Israel. They are God's will. He wanted these and all of Hashem's *mitzvos* to be fulfilled forever. Moshe dreamed,

“I will go into Israel, build the Beis Hamikdash, do the *mitzvos* of *aliya l’regel*, *bikurim*, *trumos*, *ma’asros*, and *yishuv ha’aretz*. These *mitzvos* will function and they will gain an eternal quality and never stop.” This would also mean that the Jewish people would never be exiled because, if they would, the *mitzvos* of Eretz Yisrael would stop. Moshe was so dedicated to Hashem’s will that he wanted to make sure that His will would be fulfilled forever through those *mitzvos*.

It is very sad that since Moshe never got into Eretz Yisrael, these *mitzvos* became temporary. We don’t have an inkling of many of these *mitzvos*. How many of us ever think of the *mitzva* of making *arei miklat*, refuge cities for accidental murderers, and *egla arufa*, a special way of responding when we find a dead person with unknown killers? Nowadays, these *mitzvos* are not internalized and eternalized by Klal Yisrael. We all know about *matza*, *tefillin*, *sukkos*, and *lulav*. This is because Moshe Rabbeinu did these *mitzvos*, too, so they last forever.

When Hashem didn’t allow Moshe to enter the land, it’s as if He said, “I have decided that the Jewish people will have to eternalize these *mitzvos* through their own actions. If they don’t, then I will drive them out of the land.” But Hashem did allow Moshe the opportunity to at least look at the land.

J

Powerful Vision

When a person looks at something, he connects with what he sees. If I look someone in the face, there is a different level of connection than if I write to them. We know that when we talk to someone on Skype we feel closer than in phone conversations. We experience a deeper connection to the person through the medium of vision. Moshe therefore requested to look, “*v’ereh*”—to see the Land. Looking would connect him with it, and even that

would create an eternal quality of the Land. It would connect the Land to Moshe, and that connection would eternalize the Land of Israel. Hashem granted that level of connection.

Shem Mishmuel says this was not a prophetic vision. Only true physical vision could create this connection. Hashem took Moshe up the mountain that stood high above Eretz Yisrael, so that he was able to see the land. Moshe's physical eye contact created an eternal mystical connection between the Jewish people and the holy Land of Israel.

The Gemara tells of a *talmid chacham* who saw the back of Rabbi Meir. He said, "If I only would have seen Rabbi Meir's face, I would have been a much greater *talmid chacham*." I remember when I personally saw my Rebbe Rav Soloveitchik *zt"l*. I saw Rav Moshe Feinstein *zt"l*. I learned Torah from both of them for many years. But just seeing these giants made a lifelong impact on me. Once or twice I saw the Satmar Rebbe *zt"l*, from Williamsburg, and I still can't forget the heavenly light that was shining on his face.

Hashem granted Moshe's request, allowing his gaze to create an eternal quality for Eretz Yisrael. This quality is hidden; we can't see it. Had Moshe physically stood in Eretz Yisrael, he would have made the physical *mitzvos* eternal. Since he only looked from afar at the country, he only created a mystical eternal quality. Eretz Yisrael has always remained mystically holy, even when Jews were not there. The Rambam *paskins* that Eretz Yisrael is always holy even if Jews are not there. However, when Jews are there, they create a deeper and more real, physically tangible holiness. Moshe wanted to create this tangible holiness for eternity. Hashem said this must wait for the people. If the Jewish people do the *mitzvos* when they are in Eretz Yisrael, it will happen.

May we be *zocheh* to see the real, physical tangible holiness of Eretz Yisrael, which Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to be there forever.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why does the Chumash sometimes use the name Yeshurun instead of Bnei Yisrael?
2. When is Hashem the King of Israel?
3. When is His kingship heavenly, and when is it earthly?
4. Why did Moshe want to enter Eretz Yisrael?
5. What did Moshe's gaze upon Eretz Yisrael accomplish?

EXERCISES

1. Every day for a week, do something to promote Jewish unity.
2. Every day for a week, do an extra *mitzva*.
3. Go see someone instead of talking on the phone.

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