

Beh/Bech

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The Gemora (Kesuvos 110b) says that Dovid HaMelech complained to God that "they have driven me out this day that I should not adhere to the inheritance of God, saying: 'Go, serve other gods'" (I Shmuel 26:19). The Gemora asks, "Who told Dovid: 'Go, serve other gods'?" The Gemora answers its own question, saying, "This tells you that anyone who resides outside of *Eretz Yisroel* is considered as though they are performing idol worship."

Ouch. And, lest one think this was said by the rabbis of *Eretz Yisroel* who might have been biased, it's in the Babylonian Talmud and authored by the rabbis of *Chutz L'Aretz*. They even go so far as to say that a tzaddik who lives in the Diaspora is "guilty" of worshipping idols in purity (*Avodah Zarah* 8a), just because they don't live in *Eretz Yisroel*.

And they wrote this even at a time that some still held the mitzvah was to remain in Bavel:

Rebi Zeira was avoiding being seen by his teacher, Rav Yehuda because Rebi Zeira wanted to make *aliyah* to *Eretz Yisroel* and his teacher disapproved. As Rav Yehuda said:

“Anyone who ascends from Babylonia to *Eretz Yisroel* transgresses a positive *mitzvah*...” (Kesuvos 110b)

Rav Yehuda’s opinion is questionable since the verse he quotes only applied during the Babylonian Exile that ended with the story of Purim. But, the GR”A explains why he felt that it was still relevant even during the Roman Exile. Rebi Zeira clearly disagreed, even though Rav Yehudah was his rebi.

The basis of the Gemora’s opinion is the verse from this week’s *parsha*:

Anyone who lives in *Eretz Yisroel* is considered as one who has a God, and anyone who lives outside of *Eretz Yisroel* is considered as one who does not have a God, as it says: “[I took you out of Egypt] to give to you the land of Canaan, to be your God” (Vayikra 25:38). (Kesuvos 110b)

Famously, Rabbeinu Chaim back in the twelfth century decided that the *mitzvah* did not apply in his time since it was dangerous to travel to Israel in those days, Furthermore, he added, even if you got there safely you still had to contend with the complicated laws of tithing, and most people did not know them well enough.

Nine centuries, later it’s safe to travel to Israel, thank God, we have organizations with God-fearing rabbis who know the laws of *terumos v’ma’aseros* and make sure the fruits and vegetables we buy with their *hechsherim* are perfectly permissible to eat. Now what?

Basically, you have several opinions about whether a Jew should make *aliyah* or not, about whether there is a *mitzvah* today to live in *Eretz Yisroel* or not, and about whether there is even an advantage to doing living in the holiest land in the Universe , or not. And the opinion of each side seems perfectly sound...to each side...or not.

On one hand, the “*mitzvah*” to live in *Eretz Yisroel* today is like any other. If you did it right, great. If you didn’t, you’ll have to answer to God why, not to your parents, not to your rav, and not even to yourself. Just God, and we’re going to be very surprised to hear His viewpoint on our reasons for what we did or didn’t do.

On the other hand, *Eretz Yisroel* is different than all other *mitzvos*, like Shabbos. It’s all-encompassing. It’s like living in a history book, *your* history book. Despite the incredible modernization of the land, it is still easy to feel attached to our past, to our ancestors, to our multi-millennia national development. Despite all the anti-God forces here in the land, they are never strong enough to stop that feeling of *Shechinah* 24 hours a days, seven days a week.

Sometimes *halachah* itself interferes with doing a *mitzvah*, or just the better thing. Some people have to eat on Yom Kippur. Some lose the chance to go shopping for Shabbos because they’re busy doing chesed for others in need. It happens. Life happens. *Halachah* happens.

But the moment you eat more on Yom Kippur than you have to eat it is called eating on Yom Kippur against the *halachah*. If you use a *mitzvah* as an excuse not to shop for Shabbos because you’re too lazy, that’s on you, not God.

In the end, the Gemora is saying and really, God Himself: If you have a sound *halachic* reason to not make *aliyah* then you’re fine. But if you’re using good reasons to cover up bad reasons for not making *aliyah*, then you’re not fine at all. Then, all the negative things that apply to people who unnecessarily reject God’s land will apply to you, no matter who you ask or what you rely on. It’s just you and Him.

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Have a great Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston