

FROM THE EDITOR

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"WHY DO WE NEED ISRAEL?"

That was a question that I heard posed recently. The answer, suggested by the person asking the question, was that, after the horrific events of the Holocaust, we Jews needed a place that we could call our own, that we could call 'home', and from which we could never be turned away; a safe haven from anyone who might be out to try and destroy us (again). Experiencing anti-Semitism in (insert name of country here)? Come to Israel!

But is that really why we "need" Israel, to serve as some sort of sanctuary from anti-Semitism and the many nations of the world who long to bring about our destruction? Is that why Hashem promised that small piece of land – just a bit over 20 000 square kilometres in size – in the Middle East to our forefathers almost four thousand years ago? Is that why we daven three times daily each weekday that Hashem should gather us from the four corners of the earth and return us to there?

It was only a couple of weeks ago that we celebrated Pesach and, just a month before that, Purim. Pesach commemorates Hashem's taking us out from our 116-year bondage in Egypt, where we suffered seemingly endless atrocities at the hands of the cruel Egyptians. Egypt was one of the greatest empires to ever rule the earth: wealthy, powerful, and in possession of incredible technology. And, yet, when the time finally came for our redemption, Hashem simply marched us out from there. We didn't have an army. We didn't have any weapons to speak of. And we didn't need them. In fact, we left Egypt so quickly that our dough didn't even have time to rise. So too, when we dwelled throughout the 127 provinces of King Achashverosh's empire and our destruction was decreed as a matter of law, Hashem again saved us, albeit in a more hidden fashion, despite our living in chutz l'aretz (outside of the land of Israel).

To suggest that the purpose of the land of Israel is to be some sort of safe haven is to not only entirely miss the point of this incredible treasure that has been bestowed upon us, but, simultaneously, to diminish the greatness of Hashem, chas v'shalom, implying that His ability to save us from annihilation is somehow limited by our geographic location, which, as we can see from the episodes with Pesach and Purim (to name just two), is not the case.

Whatever possessions we have, including all of our G-d-given talents, they have been given to us for a reason. Each and every one of us has a unique purpose in this world, and we have been given all of the tools that we need to fulfil that special mission – which is why there's no point in ever being jealous over what someone else has and wishing that we had it; each of us has exactly what he needs and if there's something we don't have, then we don't need it.

The same is true when it comes to the land of Israel – it too is a tool.¹ The Torah tells us that Hashem pays special attention to the land of Israel, meaning that His supervision of His world is all the more evident there.² Through the many mitzvos that apply only there (for example, fallowing the land every seventh year, etc.), the land of Israel brings with it the possibility of drawing closer to Hashem or, chas v'shalom, the opposite. Everything was created for the sake of the Torah, and Hashem took us out from Egypt so that we could serve Him and keep His Torah. So too, we received the land of Israel as a means by which we could fulfil Hashem's Torah – that is the sole purpose of the land, no different from any other object that we use for the sake of doing a mitzvah, such as tefillin, sukkah, or shofar.

Hashem can, and does, protect us anywhere, but the mitzvos unique to the land of Israel can only be done within its boundaries – that, and that alone, is why we need it.

ROBERT SUSSMAN,
EDITOR

¹Based on the Sifsei Chaim

²See Devarim 11:12 and Rashi there

ON THE COVER: THE WEATHERED STEEL HEBREW LETTERS OF THE ICONIC AHAVA SCULPTURE BY ROBERT INDIANA, BASED UPON HIS FAMOUS LOVE SCULPTURE THAT APPEARS IN CITIES AROUND THE USA. THE SCULPTURE IS PART OF THE SCULPTURE GARDEN AT THE ISRAEL MUSEUM IN JERUSALEM, WHERE IT WAS INSTALLED IN 1977. PHOTO: ROBERT SUSSMAN



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