

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Parshat Eikev

We all know that Israel is a very special place. It is the chosen land; a holy land. A land flowing with milk and honey. A blessed, beautiful land. But that is not all. It is also a land in great need of rain.

"The land which you are about to occupy is not like Egypt, the place you left, where you could plant your seed and irrigate it by yourself, just like a vegetable garden. But the land which you are crossing to occupy is a land of mountains and valleys, which can be watered only by the rain. It is therefore a land constantly under G-d your Lord's scrutiny; the eyes of G-d your Lord are on it at all times, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year" (Devarim 11:10-12).

In Egypt you can irrigate but in Israel you need rain. This is a good thing? Why is G-d singing the praises of Egypt? If Egypt is so great, why didn't G-d just give Egypt to the Jews? Is He trying to make the Jews question the wisdom of moving to Israel? Why would anyone want to live in a place that lacks basic natural resources? And what does a lack of water have to do with G-d's eyes being on Israel all year long? The answer to these questions is not too difficult to figure out. When you live in a place where everything you need is in abundant supply, it is very easy to forget that G-d is the Provider. As it says earlier in our parsha, "You may eat and be satisfied, building fine houses and living in them. Your herds and flocks may increase, and you may amass much silver and gold - everything you own may increase. But your heart may then grow haughty, and you may forget G-d your Lord, the One who brought you out of the slave house of Egypt" (8:12-14).

While it's true that the blessing of wealth can cause us to forget about our dependency on G-d, it is unlikely that citizens of Israel would develop such an attitude. Israel is a country whose survival depends on rain, and is therefore a country whose inhabitants are literally forced into G-d-consciousness. This has a profound effect on their relationship with G-d: The more G-d-conscious people are, the more people-conscious G-d is. G-d can't take His eyes off Israel, because its inhabitants can't take their eyes off Him.



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G-d deliberately designed Israel this way. From its creation, Israel was to be a home for G-d; a place where His Presence could dwell. G-d therefore designed its geological architecture in a way that makes life in Israel dependent on rain. The Jews of Israel must turn their minds and hearts heavenward for their daily sustenance. They won't become complacent or arrogant, for they are always conscious of the true source of their food. It is that reality that makes Israel the ideal environment for G-d's Presence.

Actually, it is for this very reason that G-d designed the entire world's ecosystem to be dependent on rain.

"These are the chronicles of Heaven and Earth when they were created, on the day G-d completed earth and heaven: All the wild shrubs did not yet exist on earth, and all the wild plants had not yet sprouted. This was because G-d had not yet brought rain on the earth, and there was no man to work the ground" (Beraishit 2:4-6). Rashi quotes the Talmud, "Why hadn't it rained? Because there were not yet people to work the land and appreciate the goodness of rain. When man came on the scene and recognized the need for rain, he prayed for it. The rain then fell and the trees and plants sprouted" (Chulin 60b).

Creation was not just an isolated event at the beginning of time. Creation hardwired natural law for all time. Rain will only fall when man appreciates it and prays for it. That is the way G-d engineered our world.

Israel's dependency on rain is an invaluable resource that Egypt lacks. It is wonderfully effective at keeping Israel's citizens cognizant of the fact that they are in G-d's hands. When that awareness is internalized and expressed, then the rain can fall. Unfortunately, countries on which G-d has rained His blessings (like the biblical Egypt or the U.S. today) are far less conducive to a G-d-conscious mindset. That is why G-d did not give those countries to the Jews.

Shabbat Shalom!

