



The Pardes Parsha Discussion by Rabbi Alex Israel

Ekev: The Lessons of Rain

In Israel, it doesn't rain at all during the summer. The first time our family travelled abroad during the summer, we told our kids we needed to take clothes for rain. They thought we were joking. "It can't be!" they told us, "There can't be rain in the summertime!"

This week, let's talk about the peculiar rainfall of the Land of Israel. Our parsha presents a contrast between irrigation in Egypt and in Eretz Yisrael:

For the land that you are about to enter and possess is not like the land of Egypt from which you have come. There, the grain you sowed had to be watered by your foot, like a vegetable garden, but the land you are about to cross into and possess, a land of hills and valleys, is watered by the rains of the heaven. It is a land on which the Lord your God always keeps his eye, from year's beginning to year's end. (11:10-12)

Egypt relies on the Nile. Water is plentiful. The "foot" referred to is the "plug" that stops the entry of water to the irrigation channel. You simply kick it aside, and water flows into your field until the field is fully watered and the "plug" would be replaced. In Israel, there are no major rivers. Israel is dependent upon rain, and that rain falls rarely. The rain is something that an entire nation waits for, prays for. But it should generate a powerful spiritual effect:

The river-lands more closely approximate the image of the Garden of Eden which brings forth its fruits by itself. Even if irrigation demands effort, the continual abundance of soil that is fertile and easy to work, and of water, gives man a feeling of complete security. It is as though he holds the guarantee of his future sustenance in his own hands. He can ensure himself against want. This is not so, however, of a land watered by rain. There, nature gives no guarantees. All depends upon the grace of rain over which man has no control.

In the river-lands then, a culture may develop based upon man's aspiration for complete mastery over the primary factors that condition his existence and his

well-being. In the mountainous country, however, this is not so. There, even the illusion of mastery cannot survive. One who lives in that land knows that he is dependent upon a force over which he has no control...

...**awareness of the dependence that limits human sovereignty is the foundation for a culture of faith, the culture of free men.** It is precisely on this account that the land of Israel is appropriate to the chosen people which is subject to constant divine supervision and is always aware of being commanded by God. (*Professor Eliezer Schweid - The Land of Israel. National Home or Land of Destiny?*)

Please discuss:

- Can a land's water supply so drastically affect its national character?
- Does a state of insecurity generate a "culture of faith?"
- Conversely, does a state of material comfort and security create a smug and self-assured culture? When we see Egypt in the Torah, they always enslave people (Abraham and Sarah, Joseph, the Children of Israel.) Is slavery related to this aspect of Egypt?
- Is it healthy for Israel to be so insecure, so dependent upon God's blessing?

The rain connects us to God in another way, as we quote the next passage of the parsha, best known to us in the Shema:

If, you obey the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day...I will grant the **rain for your land in season, the early rain and the late**...Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods...for the Lord's anger will flare up against you, and He will shut up the skies so that **there will be no rain** and the ground will not yield its produce. (11:13-16)

For the book of Devarim, adherence to God's laws brings rain and prosperity. Conversely, disloyalty to God engenders drought and national disaster. The rain is the barometer of religious behavior in that it serves as the tool of reward and punishment.

- Do you sense that the Land of Israel today fosters a more direct connection to God?
- If this is not through the rain, in what dimension of life is this sensibility apparent? How does Israel make God more present, if at all?
- Today, in a world where rain patterns are a subject for meteorologists and desalination experts rather than people of religion and faith, is there still a connection between rainfall and God?

Shabbat Shalom!