How Did Avraham Merit Eretz Yisroel?

וַיִּקַּח תֶּרַח אֶת אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וְאֶת לוֹט בֶּן הָרָן בֶּן בְּנוֹ וְאֶת שָׂרַי כַּלָּתוֹ אֵשֶׁת אַבְרָם בְּנוֹ וַיֵּצְאוּ אִתָּם מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים לָלֶכֶת אַרְצָה כְּנַעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד חָרָן וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם. וַיִּהְיוּ יְמֵי תֶרַח חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים וּמָאתַיִם שָׁנָה וַיָּמָת תֶּרַח בְּחָרָן. וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל אַבְרָם לֶךְ לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ וּמִמּוֹלַדְתְּךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ.

"Terach took Avram his son, Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, the wife of Avram his son; and they went out together from Ur Kasdim to travel to the land of Canaan. They came as far as Charan and settled there. The days of Terach were two hundred and five years, and Terach died in Charan. Hashem said to Avram: Go forth from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you." (Bereishis 11–12)

The holy Zohar learns from this that until a person himself chooses to go to Eretz Yisroel, Hashem does not assist him or command him to go there. The Zohar states that this is the source for the teaching, "One who comes to purify himself is assisted!"[1]

These are its words: "Come and see what is written: 'Terach took Avram his son and Lot the son of Haran … and they went out together from Ur Kasdim.' … At the time they departed, what is written? 'To travel to the land of Canaan,' for their desire was to go there. From here we learn that whoever awakens himself to become purified is assisted. Come and see that this is so: as soon as it says 'to travel to the land of Canaan,' it immediately says, 'Hashem said to Avram: Go forth.' Until he first awakened himself, 'Go forth' was not written."

"Come and see: an awakening above does not occur until there has first been an awakening below toward that upon which the awakening above will rest... Likewise, when a person first awakens himself, an awakening above is then aroused. Come and see: immediately after the words 'They went out together from Ur Kasdim,' it says, 'Hashem said to Avram.'"

We learn from this that Avraham Avinu merited the full greatness of Eretz Yisroel only when he himself recognized its greatness, yearned for it on his own initiative, and took action to merit it. Only then did Hashem tell him to go there and merit it. To understand the tremendous yearning and love that Avraham Avinu had for Eretz Yisroel, by virtue of which he merited it, we should examine the words of our Rabbeim.

The Torah says:

וַיִּקַּח אַבְרָם אֶת שָׂרַי אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת לוֹט בֶּן אָחִיו וְאֶת כָּל רְכוּשָׁם אֲשֶׁר רָכָשׁוּ וְאֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ בְחָרָן וַיֵּצְאוּ לָלֶכֶת אַרְצָה כְּנָעַן וַיָּבֹאוּ אַרְצָה כְּנָעַן.

"And Avram took Sarai his wife, Lot his brother's son, all the possessions they had acquired, and the souls they had made in Charan. They departed to travel to the land of Canaan, and they arrived in the land of Canaan" (Bereishis, Chapter 12).

The Agra D'Kallah writes:

'And Avram took': "He persuaded them with words and informed them of the greatness of Eretz Yisroel."

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[1] There is an additional wonder here: Lech Lecha was the first or second of Avraham's tests, yet it was given to him only because he had already chosen this path. Consider this carefully.

The Agra D'Kallah continues to describe the extraordinary magnitude of this journey, explaining the large number of people who traveled with Avraham: " 'Sarai his wife': the additional word "את" may include her maidservants and female servants. 'Lot': the additional "את" may include members of Lot's household. 'All their possessions': the additional "את" may perhaps include the tithes or fifths of their profits, which he took along to spend in the holiness of Eretz Yisroel. 'Their possessions': it does not say 'his possessions' in the singular, indicating that Sarah also earned income, for she was an eishes chayil, a crown to her husband, like merchant ships, etc., as Shlomo praised her (Mishlei 31:14). … 'The souls,' etc.: According to Chazal, this refers to the converts whom they converted (Sanhedrin 99b). Perhaps the additional "את" includes those converts who in turn converted members of their own households or relatives, and the like."

The words of the Agra D'Kallah become even clearer in light of Chazal's explanation of the posuk:

"וְעֵינְכֶם אַל תָּחֹס עַל כְּלֵיכֶם"

"Let your eyes not be concerned for your belongings." The Midrash Seichel Tov comments: "From here we learn that travel and displacement are exceptionally difficult for a person." In those times, moving from place to place was especially difficult. Only because Yosef was viceroy of Egypt could he tell his brothers to leave their belongings in their land, promising to provide everything they needed. Avraham, by contrast, had to travel with all his possessions and utensils, with all the difficulties this involved. Nevertheless, his love for Eretz Yisroel overcame the ordinary considerations, and he was able to influence all those with him to join joyfully, as the posuk attests, "Avram took," in the words of the Agra D'Kallah: "He persuaded them with words and informed them of the greatness of Eretz Yisroel."

The Agra D'Kallah continues to describe the greatness of their love for Eretz Yisroel and for the mitzvos of Hashem: " 'They went out to travel to the land of Canaan': It should have said, 'They went to the land of Canaan.' It seems to me that this teaches the holy affection of Avraham and Sarah and how they yearned to fulfill the command of the Creator, blessed be He. Ordinarily, when people travel to a distant destination and the journey will take considerable time, at the outset, when they need to ask which road to take, they do not ask which road leads to the final destination, since there are many towns along the way. Rather, they ask which road leads to the nearby town, and from there to the next town. But because of their tremendous love of holiness, the mention of Eretz Yisroel never left their lips from the moment they departed their home. Immediately they would ask: Which road leads to the land of Canaan?"

He writes further: " 'They came to the land of Canaan':.. It seems to me that this, too, reveals their love to holiness. Hashem's mitzvah was not a burden upon him. Had it been burdensome, something he felt compelled to fulfill, it would have sufficed to reach the edge of Eretz Yisroel and settle there. But Avraham's love was different: he yearned intensely to fulfill the Creator's mitzvah in the fullest possible manner. Once he saw that Hashem desired dwelling in this holy land, he did not content himself with fulfilling his obligation by reaching its border and resting there. Rather, **he wished to walk through it from end to end, delighting in the Creator's mitzvah**."

"This resembles what Chazal say about the pious and men of good deeds, who did not put down their lulav all day during the time of the mitzvah (Sukkah 41b), although a single taking suffices to fulfill the obligation. They acted this way because of their great love for the Creator's mitzvos. Thus it is fitting that the Torah did not say la'aretz, 'to the land,' but artzah, **indicating a desire to travel the entire land and delight in the Creator's mitzvah**. For this is the whole purpose of man: to take delight in the Creator's mitzvos."

These words bring us back to the teaching of our Rabbeim cited above: Avraham merited Eretz Yisroel specifically through his yearning and actions. It was therefore only after he had already begun traveling that Hashem commanded him to go to Eretz Yisroel.

Continuing the teaching of our Rabbeim, it was precisely because Avraham cherished the land that Hashem commanded him to walk through it and thereby acquire it. The Torah relates (Bereishis 13):

שָׂא נָא עֵינֶיךָ וּרְאֵה מִן הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שָׁם צָפֹנָה וָנֶגְבָּה וְקֵדְמָה וָיָמָּה. כִּי אֶת כָּל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה רֹאֶה לְךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה וּלְזַרְעֲךָ עַד עוֹלָם. וְשַׂמְתִּי אֶת זַרְעֲךָ כַּעֲפַר הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אִם יוּכַל אִישׁ לִמְנוֹת אֶת עֲפַר הָאָרֶץ גַּם זַרְעֲךָ יִמָּנֶה. קוּם הִתְהַלֵּךְ בָּאָרֶץ לְאָרְכָּהּ וּלְרָחְבָּהּ כִּי לְךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה.

"Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward, southward, eastward and westward. For all the land that you see, I will give to you and to your descendants forever. I will make your descendants like the dust of the earth; if a person could count the dust of the earth, your descendants too could be counted. Arise, walk through the land along its length and breadth, for I will give it to you."

The Torah then tells us that Avram pitched his tents and settled by the oaks of Mamrei in Chevron, where he built an altar to Hashem. Thus Hashem commanded Avraham to do what, as the Agra D'Kallah explains, he had already chosen to do. Because he loved this activity, Hashem made it a commandment, through which he would merit acquiring Eretz Yisroel: "For I will give it to you."

The Torah also says:

וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלָיו ה'... וַיַּעֲבֹר אַבְרָם בָּאָרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם שְׁכֶם עַד אֵלוֹן מוֹרֶה ... וַיֵּרָא ה' אֶל אַבְרָם וַיֹּאמֶר לְזַרְעֲךָ אֶתֵּן אֶת הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת.

"Avram went as Hashem had spoken to him... Avram passed through the land as far as Shechem, to the oak of Moreh ... Hashem appeared to Avram and said: To your descendants I will give this land."

Bereishis Rabbah (39) records Reb Levi's teaching: While Avraham traveled through Aram Naharayim and Aram Nachor, he saw people eating, drinking and behaving frivolously. He said, "May I have no portion in this land." When he reached the Ladder of Tzur, he saw people weeding when it was time to weed and hoeing when it was time to hoe. He said, "May my portion be in this land!" Hashem then told him, "To your descendants I will give this land." Once again, only after Avraham saw the character of the land, was favorably impressed, yearned for it and prayed to receive it did Hashem promise it to him.

All of this shows that every aspect of acquiring Eretz Yisroel came through first seeking the place, before the command and even before Hashem revealed Himself to Avraham about it.

This is the meaning of the Sifrei cited above: "Might you wait until a prophet tells you? Scripture says, 'Seek His dwelling': seek and find, and afterward a prophet will tell you."

There is something remarkable in the repeated promise of the land in Bereishis 13. As explained above, Avraham received this promise as a reward for his own initiative in traversing the land. The Netziv (as quoted in Lechu Neranenah) explains that the repeated promise teaches future generations that during the second and third returns to Eretz Yisroel, the Jewish people must first undertake the building of the land themselves, and only afterward will Hashem awaken to complete the work for them.

I found the following quotation attributed to the Netziv:

קוּם הִתְהַלֵּךְ בָּאָרֶץ לְאָרְכָּהּ וּלְרָחְבָּהּ כִּי לְךָ אֶתְּנֶנָּה.

"Arise, walk through the land along its length and breadth, for I will give it to you." (Bereishis 13:17)

He explains: "Hashem repeated His promise to give the land. This refers to the time after the Jewish people would be punished, exiled, and diminished in number, when they would return to Eretz Yisroel and settle there. "However, they would not settle it in the same manner as they did originally, in the days of Yehoshua.

At that time, the promise, 'For all the land that you see,' was fulfilled, because the Jewish people did not have to build houses; they found everything already prepared for them.

"But concerning the second and third redemptions, Avraham Avinu was instructed to walk throughout the land. "Likewise, when Hashem returns the Jewish people to the Holy Land, they will be required to build houses and establish the settlements themselves."

In a letter the Netziv further explains: We believe Hashem's promise to Avraham that all the land he saw would be given to him and his descendants forever. First Hashem said he would acquire the land by seeing it; afterward He commanded him to walk through it, thereby receiving it. At the first inheritance under Yehoshua bin Nun, the Jewish people were not required to begin settlement work before arriving, because they found a fully developed land. But after the exile, when they had become "like the dust of the earth," trampled by everyone, the command "Arise, walk through the land" applies to the return following exile. We must travel through the land and engage in its settlement before we merit it speedily in our days. Hashem said "walk through the land," not simply "go to the land," because Avraham's journey was not by natural means alone but through Divine strength. Likewise the settlement will be carried out by Yisroel, but with Divine assistance, as in Ezra's time when the people themselves built the houses, and as will occur in the future redemption. (Shivas Tzion, vol. 2, p. 5.)

We see, then, that Avraham merited Eretz Yisroel through his longing and his efforts to travel there, delight in it and acquire it. The Netziv teaches that the future follows the same pattern of "the deeds of the fathers are a sign for the children." He was writing about the movement in his own day of Jews returning to Eretz Yisroel in large numbers. He urged Jews everywhere "to awaken to Hashem's will, do whatever they could, whether much or little, and encourage people of every group to ascend, settle the land, build it and plant fruit trees". He also wrote that the desire to return had awakened throughout the Jewish world, "the voice of the multitude like the voice of Shakkai"; therefore we should follow Hashem's words and trust Him to finish what we begin. (Shivas Tzion, vol. 2, p. 7.)

Other Rabbeim likewise learned from the plain meaning of the pesukim that the Jewish people's return to their holy land would follow the pattern of the Avos.

Aharon Sorsky relates that during the Imrei Emes's first visit to Eretz Yisroel, the day after he visited the government palace, Arab rioters attacked newly arrived Jewish settlers in Yaffo. They killed about fifty Jews, injured some two hundred and looted homes and shops. Many viewed this bloodshed, following the Balfour Declaration, as a dreadful sign of the dangers confronting Jewish settlement. "My joy was disturbed by the distressing reports from Yaffo," the Rebbe wrote. Yet he did not abandon his earlier intentions. He prayed that Hashem avenge the blood of the victims, as the posuk says:

וְנִקֵּיתִי דָמָם לֹא נִקֵּיתִי וַה' שֹׁכֵן בְּצִיּוֹן.

"I will avenge their blood, which I have not yet avenged, and Hashem dwells in Tzion."

"Hashem dwells in Tzion" was the starting point for his approach to Eretz Yisroel. Despite the fear of the murderous gangs, that very day he supported a substantial purchase of land in Yaffo as the beginning of a flourishing settlement project. Later, while sailing back to Poland, he told his companions that Avraham's test on arriving in Eretz Yisroel was the famine that immediately broke out, with people blaming him, yet he neither lost heart nor questioned Hashem's ways. His companions understood this as an allusion to the violence that occurred during his own visit. (Niv HaMoreh, issue 190, p. 4.)

The Mashgiach, HaGaon HaTzaddik Reb Yechezkel Levenstein, expounded the posuk "He gave their land as an inheritance, an inheritance to Yisroel His servant." The promise of Eretz Yisroel offers a tangible way to

strengthen emunah. We read how Hashem promised Avraham that the Jewish people and Eretz Yisroel would endure forever. After all the suffering and upheavals we have experienced, we have merited the land in fulfillment of His promise. Contemplating this alone should strengthen our emunah beyond measure. (Ohr Yechezkel, vol. 3, Emunah, p. 65.)

AWAKENING FROM BELOW, ISARUSA D'LESATA

We have explained that Avraham merited Eretz Yisroel because he sought it, yearned for it and acted before Hashem commanded him. Hashem saw his awakening and rewarded him. The Netziv and Imrei Emes teach that this pattern of the Avos applies to our generation as well, in the times of Moshiach. To merit inheriting Eretz Yisroel again, we must take concrete steps that constitute an awakening from below; only afterward will Hashem grant it to us in practice. This principle is evident throughout the words of our later Rabbeim.

The holy Zohar (Bamidbar 118a) teaches that the Torah's mitzvos are exalted above. When a person performs a mitzvah, that mitzvah stands before Hashem, adorned, and declares that a particular person performed it. Because he stirred an awakening below, an awakening arises above, producing peace above and below, as the posuk says:

אוֹ יַחֲזֵק בְּמָעוּזִּי יַעֲשֶׂה שָׁלוֹם לִי שָׁלוֹם יַעֲשֶׂה לִי.

"Or let him take hold of My strength; let him make peace with Me; peace let him make with Me."

Fortunate is the one who performs the Torah's mitzvos. The Zohar continues: "Rejoice with Yerushalayim," because complete joy is found only when Yisroel dwells in the Holy Land, where the wife is united with her husband and joy prevails above and below. When Yisroel is not in the Holy Land, one may not rejoice and display joy in that full sense, for the posuk specifically says to rejoice "with her."

HaGaon Reb Aryeh Shapiro pointed out the Gra's commentary in Yahel Ohr: the wife's union with her husband refers to Tiferes resting upon Malchus in Eretz Yisroel. This, too, expresses how an awakening from below arouses an awakening above, and this is the reason for the proximity of these teachings in the Zohar.

HaGaon Reb Aryeh explained that the Gra means that fulfilling mitzvos specifically in Eretz Yisroel (as the Ramban explains in several places) awakens Hashem's closeness to us, like the relationship of a bride and groom. The Zohar places the teachings together because the performance of mitzvos brings about that Divine awakening. Thus, in the Zohar's formulation, the complete joy described is associated specifically with Eretz Yisroel.

In 5599 (1839), the Gra's talmidim wrote to Moshe Montefiore asking him to purchase agricultural land. They wrote that the eyes and hearts of the holy Jewish nation awaited the awakening of love, when the land would yield its produce for the holy people living upon it. They cited a tradition from their fathers that observing the Torah and the mitzvos dependent on the land would strengthen the spiritual union and draw blessing from its source. "The matter depends on an awakening from below to awaken an awakening above. How long will our holy land remain desolate, and Hashem's people an object of disgrace?" Their words closely resemble the Zohar and the Gra's explanation: awakening love depends upon mitzvos performed in Eretz Yisroel, especially those dependent upon the land.

The Gra's talmidim also wrote regarding the rebuilding of Yerushalayim and the Churvah beis midrash: "Raise the remembrance of Yerushalayim above your greatest joy. Awaken, arise like mighty men, and strengthen yourselves for our people and the city of our G-d. Raise up the holy Shechinah and find a resting place for her in our beis midrash. Arise and show mercy to Tzion, for the time has come to favor her, to cherish her stones and dust. The matter depends on awakening from below to arouse awakening above, to rebuild the ruins." (Ginzei Yerushalayim, vol. 2, p. 3.)

For this reason Reb Yisroel of Shklov also worked toward the gathering of the exiles and the Ten Lost Tribes. In his letter to them he wrote: "All these matters first require an awakening from below."

Chabad chassidim in Chevron likewise called for mercy upon the devastated and desolate land, rebuilding its ruins, strengthening settlement and giving Hashem's people a portion and inheritance in the Holy Land. "An awakening from below is needed to arouse the higher love." (HaShivah LiYerushalayim, p. 518.)

HaGaon Reb Meir Auerbach, author of Imrei Binah, wrote in a letter that those working the holy soil should become an example to all Jews who could help redeem the land. Through their awakening below, Hashem's promise, "And I will remember the land," would awaken in response. He concluded with a blessing for peace and signed in Yerushalayim on 28 Sivan 5636 (1876), identifying himself as formerly rav of Kalisz. (Shivas Tzion, p. 95.)

Reb Yisroel of Ruzhin had already expressed this principle. Sefer HaZichronos of Reb Isaac the Chassid relates that in 5608 (1848), when some believed the days of Moshiach had arrived and that the Ruzhiner would be Moshiach, he rejected the idea. The generation, he said, was not worthy of a miraculous redemption. If the Jewish people were simply permitted to return to Eretz Yisroel without miracles, they would be freed from physical subjugation and spiritual salvation would follow. First must come an awakening from below through real deeds and actions, not thoughts and desires alone. The first stage would be redemption through natural means, as in Ezra's time during the Second Beis HaMikdash, and afterward the true spiritual redemption would come in Eretz Yisroel.

In his famous letter to the author of Nefesh Chayah, the holy Reb Eliyahu of Greiditz described the principle of acting first so as to receive the blessing of redemption as a matter of human reason. He wrote to Reb Chaim Elazar, rav of Kalisz, that he was convinced that if 130 Jewish families began cultivating the holy soil, this would be the beginning of redemption even if Yisroel were otherwise unworthy. He could explain only a little in a letter. Human reason, too, teaches that we must begin redeeming the land ourselves, and Hashem will finish the work. (Nefesh Chayah, responsum 1.)

HaGaon Reb Shimon Sofer praised the colony of Rosh Pinah near Tzfas and called supporting it a great merit. It required ten thousand francs. He expressed hope that Hashem would establish the work of the settlers' hands, that they would reap what they had sown, multiply in the Holy Land, and be joined by G-d-fearing Jews from throughout the Diaspora. They would build houses and plant vineyards, resettling the desolate land, and through this merit bring the complete redemption closer and behold Moshiach. (Shivas Tzion, p. 95.)

The holy Reb Yisroel Friedman of Chortkov rejoiced to hear that Torah-observant Jews wished to form a society and purchase land in Eretz Yisroel to settle people there to cultivate fields and plant vineyards while keeping the Torah. He encouraged them to bring the plan to fruition: through an awakening from below, a spirit from Heaven would awaken, and Hashem would have mercy upon us and bring us to Tzion in joy. (Sefer Likkutim, p. 49.)

Our Rabbeim, the luminaries of our generations, likewise taught that through settling all of Eretz Yisroel we may merit the arrival of Moshiach Tzidkeinu. In Igros Moshe (Orach Chaim, vol. 5, sec. 37), Reb Moshe Feinstein wrote: "We hope that Melech HaMoshiach will come soon, when all the cities of Yisroel are established."

Reb Moshe also encouraged the building of Immanuel. When Reb Efraim Zalman Margulies of England told him he intended to establish a substantial Jewish town in Shomron, Reb Moshe was deeply moved by the expansion of chareidi settlement in Eretz Yisroel and said, "This city will bring the arrival of Moshiach Tzidkeinu closer." This was related by Reb Y. Brand in the name of Reb Mordechai Eichler, formerly rav of Immanuel.

On Rosh Chodesh Iyar 5710 (1950), at the cornerstone laying for a refugee residence associated with Yeshivas Sfas Emes, the Rebbi knowns as the Beis Yisroel spoke on the posuk:

בּוֹנֵה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם ה׳ נִדְחֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יְכַנֵּס.

"Hashem builds Yerushalayim; He gathers the dispersed of Yisroel."

He explained that the mitzvah of settling Eretz Yisroel includes increasing construction: every additional building is part of the mitzvah. Building with Hashem means increasing the honor of Heaven and Torah. When Jews build the land in fulfillment of Hashem's command, the continuation of the posuk, "He gathers the dispersed of Yisroel," will be fulfilled. There is no other way. The brokenhearted survivors of war and suffering will find healing, and those supporting a house dedicated to Torah and yiras Shamayim will merit complete redemption, spiritual and physical. (Beis Yisroel Lehavah, p. 294.)

Reb Yechezkel Levenstein likewise said that these days visibly resemble the days of Moshiach. Eretz Yisroel is being built as never before; perhaps the redemption will come when it is settled. He recalled that at the time of the Balfour Declaration the Chofetz Chaim called it an awakening toward redemption, while warning that it mattered who would take possession of the land. How much more, he said, is the present rebuilding a preparation for redemption. (Ohr Yechezkel, vol. 3, Emunah, p. 279.) Elsewhere he said that after centuries of desolation the Jewish people had suddenly merited returning and rebuilding the land in an extraordinary manner; therefore we must awaken and anticipate redemption and Melech HaMoshiach. (Vol. 7, Darkei HaAvodah, p. 94.)

Reb Eliyahu Dessler wrote that he cherished aliyah to Eretz Yisroel very greatly because of the mitzvah of settling the land, and that through this mitzvah Hashem might grant us a speedy and complete redemption through His true Moshiach. (Michtav MeEliyahu, vol. 6, p. 314.)

Reb Ben Tzion Mutzafi relates a story about his father, the mekubal Reb Salman Mutzafi. During the last two years of his father's life, he would walk on Shabbos from Geulah, near Meah Shearim, to his son's home in Sanhedria, where they would learn together from two in the afternoon until eight at night. One Shabbos in 5731 (1971), shortly before eight, his father suggested a walk and directed him toward the Ramat Eshkol neighborhood, where construction was underway. As they walked through streets of new and partly built buildings, his father began to cry. Asked whether he was feeling well, he answered yes, but continued to weep as he looked around.

His father explained that since childhood, when he had heard the Ben Ish Chai's derashos and received his blessing every Shabbos, he had longed for Tzion and Eretz Yisroel. They had cried day and night to merit coming there. He had merited living in the land, something his ancestors had not, but had not yet seen the central salvation. Now he saw Yerushalayim beginning to be rebuilt. He explained: "For every stone built here in Eretz Yisroel, there is a corresponding light in Heaven. Angels build it. These are not merely the rough stones, concrete, iron and floor tiles you see. Corresponding to the Yerushalayim below is the Yerushalayim above; and corresponding to the earthly Eretz Yisroel is the heavenly Eretz Yisroel."

The Klausenberger Rebbe wrote that we must continue this work and arouse the heavenly angels to cry out to Hashem for mercy upon Tzion and the rebuilding of Yerushalayim's walls in everlasting redemption. The ruins of Yerushalayim begin to be rebuilt even before redemption, because Hashem knows that Moshiach will not come to redeem us while Yerushalayim lies desolate, without a place to lodge. These are profound mysteries, understood by those who are like children of Hashem, to whom He reveals His secrets as consolation for the delay. Some misunderstand these matters and turn truth upside down; rather than pleading

for mercy on the Jewish people, they search for accusations against them. We pray that Hashem not heed such accusations, which arise from self-interest. (Shefa Chaim, vol. 2, p. 76.)

It is worth quoting the maggid Reb Yehudah Leib ben Moshe HaLevi Edel, who was close to the Gra and his son Reb Avraham, in his work Afikei Yehudah (derush 22, paragraphs 12–13). He argues that we must not repeat the failure associated with the Second Beis HaMikdash, when not all the Jews ascended to Eretz Yisroel and parts of the land remained desolate. Rather, all should ascend and settle throughout the land, so that there will be no third exile.

He writes that Hashem knew the second redemption did not endure because not everyone returned. He therefore comforted them that in the third redemption this cause of national ruin would no longer exist. Thus the posuk says:

שְׂאִי סָבִיב עֵינַיִךְ וּרְאִי כֻּלָּם נִקְבְּצוּ בָאוּ לָךְ.

"Lift your eyes all around and see: they have all gathered and come to you."

They will not ascend in halves; rather:

כִּי כֻלָּם כָּעֲדִי תִלְבָּשִׁי ... כַּכַּלָּה תַּעְדֶּה כֵּלֶיהָ.

"For you shall wear them all as an ornament ... like a bride adorning herself with her jewels."

The people will not be a burden but an adornment. The prophet continues:

כִּי חָרְבֹתַיִךְ וְשִׁמְמֹתַיִךְ וְאֶרֶץ הֶרְסָתֵיִךְ ... עַתָּה תִּצְרִי מִיּוֹשֶׁב ... וְרָחֲקוּ מְבַלְּעָיִךְ.

"For your ruins and desolate places and your devastated land ... now you will be too crowded with inhabitants ... and those who would swallow you up will be far away."

The emptiness of the land in the Second Beis HaMikdash period contributed to its destruction; in the future no empty places will remain to become a cause of destruction, and the enemies will be driven away. The prophet further says that children will speak in Tzion's ears. If a family or tribe should remain unwilling to ascend, as happened when the exiles returned from Bavel, the remaining exiles will send letter after letter urging them:

בֵּית יַעֲקֹב לְכוּ וְנֵלְכָה.

"House of Yaakov, come, let us go."

They will call upon them to fill and settle the land, not letting laziness prevent them from ascending to Tzion. They will remind one another that the empty spaces of the Second Beis HaMikdash period caused grievous harm, and now say, "Make room for me so I may dwell," ensuring the land's lasting settlement.

The conclusion is that Jewish settlement of Eretz Yisroel and complete redemption follow the example of Avraham Avinu: he merited the land only after taking action to acquire it.

Another relevant source is Devarim 12:

כִּי אִם אֶל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם מִכֹּל שִׁבְטֵיכֶם לָשׂוּם אֶת שְׁמוֹ שָׁם לְשִׁכְנוֹ תִדְרְשׁוּ וּבָאתָ שָּׁמָּה.

"Rather, seek the place that Hashem your G-d will choose from among all your tribes to place His Name there, as His dwelling, and go there."

The Sifrei teaches: "Might you wait until a prophet tells you? Scripture says, 'Seek His dwelling': seek and find, and afterward a prophet will tell you." Thus even before the Beis HaMikdash is built and its site chosen, we must make efforts to bring this about ourselves, and afterward Hashem will send the prophet. The words of our Rabbeim express a similar principle regarding Eretz Yisroel.

REDEMPTION THROUGH NATURAL MEANS

I would like to expand on the idea "Isarusa d'lesata" an awakening from below, people commonly explain "redemption through natural means" as the first glimmer of light appearing naturally because we lack sufficient merits to receive the great hidden light immediately. On this view, natural redemption is a less-than-ideal path: had we fulfilled all that was demanded of us, redemption would have occurred entirely through miracles. While this idea has validity, it seems to be a superficial understanding of the matter.

Throughout the generations, appointed times for redemption passed without our meriting it. Chazal said, "All the appointed times have passed" (Avodah Zarah 9a). The reason is that "the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Reb Chama bar Reb Chanina said that without three pesukim the Jewish people would have no defense, one being "And I caused the evil," referring to Hashem's creation of the yetzer hara (Berachos 32a). Chazal also said that the yetzer hara is so difficult that even its Creator called it evil, as the posuk says:

כִּי יֵצֶר לֵב הָאָדָם רַע מִנְּעֻרָיו.

"For the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth."

(Kiddushin 30b.) A generation in which everyone is wholly righteous would itself be something miraculous.

There are two forms of Divine conduct in the world: through nature and above nature. The foundation of natural conduct is that Hashem created the world for us to do what is required of us, physically and spiritually. Chazal teach that one who hates gifts will live, and speak critically of a person for whom the natural order must be altered; they teach "he shall surely heal," "man is born for toil," and "the Torah is acquired only by one who gives himself over completely to it." The Mesillas Yesharim explains in its introduction that this arrangement allows us to merit reward through our actions: today is the time to perform them, and tomorrow to receive their reward.

As the pesukim say:

כִּי יְבָרֶכְךָ ... בְּכָל תְּבוּאָתְךָ וּבְכֹל מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶיךָ.

"For He will bless you ... in all your produce and in all the work of your hands." (Devarim 16.)

כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּכֹחֲךָ עֲשֵׂה.

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your strength." (Koheles 9.)

Accordingly, when we speak of redemption through natural means, the meaning is that after our sins have been atoned for through suffering and other means, and the long exile has purified us so that we are worthy of redemption, the manner of redemption is no different from the rest of Hashem's governance of the world. Hashem conducts His world through our actions. If we do what lies within our power, He will complete the work for us and rest His Shechinah upon the work of our hands.

This is what it means that redemption depends upon isarusa d'lesata. In truth, all our actions are an awakening from below: when we do what is incumbent upon us, our work receives blessing.