

Light Insight

The Eye Of The Beholder

*“The Land of Israel is very good.”
(14:7)*

Too often American and European Jews living in Israel are made to hear, “I don’t know how you live in this country. You’re living in the Third World. It’s dirty and dangerous. It’s beyond my comprehension why someone with a decent standard of living would uproot himself and live in such a place.”

Why is it that to some people the Land of Israel seems so beautiful while others struggle to see its beauty and leave disappointed?

Once, there was a beautiful princess who had a great many suitors for her hand in marriage.

Obviously she could not seriously examine each and every one of her suitors and so she devised a plan to select the more promising candidates.

When a young man would come to woo her, her servants would usher him into an antechamber. On the table in front of him were some fruit and some books of Torah scholarship. The servants told him that the princess would be with him shortly. They bade him make himself comfortable and to help himself to some fruit. What the suitor did not know was that there was a spyhole in the wall of the room. Through this, the princess would observe the aspiring husband.

If he took a piece of fruit and made a blessing, thanking G-d for the tasty bit of nourishment, or if he took up a book and began to

study it intently, then she would emerge in her finest apparel and appear before him in all her radiant beauty.

If, however, the suitor took some fruit without showing the proper appreciation for it, or idled his time away and didn’t make use of the opportunity to study Torah, then she would put on torn rags, blacken her face and teeth and emerge looking like a hag.

The Land of Israel is that princess. If a person comes looking for spirituality, he will be enchanted even by her physical beauty. On the other hand, if a person is not worthy, everything will seem dirty and dingy.

However, the Land of Israel will never embarrass a person. Rather than suffering the embarrassment of being the one rejected, the Land of Israel allows the person to think that he has rejected her.

LOVE of the LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and the Land of Israel

Jericho

The first city to be conquered by Joshua and the Jewish People, Jericho relied on its impenetrable fortifications to with-

stand any attack. After receiving his spies’ report that the fear of Israel gripped the city’s inhabitants, Joshua led his army in a march around Jericho’s massive walls for seven days. On the seventh day the walls miraculously gave way, allowing the city to be conquered.

The walls did not actually

“come tumbling down” as the old song has it. Since they were as thick as they were high, such a tumble would have been meaningless. They sank into the ground, with only a small portion remaining above the ground to mark the miracle.

Modern Jericho is populated by Arabs, but there is an ancient synagogue which Jews have made repeated efforts to preserve as a Jewish holy place.

The Other SIDE of the Story

GIVING PEOPLE THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT

Testing, Testing

Hi, I'm sure that it was on the Ohr Somayach Web Site that I saw that you were asking for nice stories on judging others favorably. Well I have a nice story for you: A friend of mine was going to help some students for their upcoming exam. She was feeling sick, but she still stayed up

the whole night preparing and making notes etc. Their lesson was scheduled for 10.45 a.m. until 1.15 p.m.

At about 1.30 p.m. she phoned me to say that the girls didn't show up and that she was really hurt and put out after all she did for the lesson she was supposed to give them. She added that they were very inconsiderate that they didn't even have the courtesy to phone and tell her that they wouldn't be coming. At about 5.30 p.m. she phoned me back to tell me that the girls had been in a car accident on the way to her house. They had come home and immediately phoned to tell her what had happened! What a lesson this was for us...

• A reader in South Africa

Response Line

**S. Aaron Skiles from
West Point USMA wrote:**

What is the meaning behind placing the mezuzah in the doorpost at a slant or angle? Is it always done that way, or can it be placed upright and vertical?

Dear S. Aaron,

The Talmud says that a *mezuzah* attached in a way that looks like a "nagar" is invalid. Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi) defines "nagar" as a sideways bolt. According to this, a *mezuzah* placed sideways on a doorpost would be invalid.

ing in could read it.

Rabbi Yaakov Tam disagrees. He defines "nagar" as a vertical bolt. He writes that placing a *mezuzah* upright would be disrespectful, comparable to burying a person in a standing position. Rather, the *mezuzah* should be placed like the Tablets were placed in the Holy Ark — horizontally.

Rabbi Yosef Karo rules according to the opinion of Rashi — that the *mezuzah* should be placed vertically. This is the accepted Sefardic practice and this is also the ruling of Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna.

Rather, one should place it straight up and down, so that someone walk-

Rabbi Moshe Isserles, however, cites the opinion of Rabbi Yaakov Tam, that a vertical *mezuzah* is invalid. Taking this opinion into consideration, he states that the best way is to put the *mezuzah* on a slant, with the word "Shma" towards the inside. Since the *mezuzah* is neither vertical nor horizontal, it is valid according to both opinions.

I once heard a beautiful explanation of the symbolism of the slanting *mezuzah*: The *mezuzah* is placed on the doorpost of the house - the house being the abode of husband and wife. The slanting *mezuzah* "teaches" every couple how to create tranquillity in the home. Each one should be prepared to compromise and "bend towards the other" in helping to lead a harmonious family life.