

Light Insight

School for Kindness

In the first, second, fourth and fifth years of the seven-year Sabbatical cycle, Jews living in the Land of Israel were instructed to separate a tenth of their crops, and bring them to Jerusalem to eat. In the third and sixth years of the cycle, that tenth was given to the poor instead.

One might ask: "Why weren't

the landowners required to first share with the poor and only subsequently to enjoy their produce in Jerusalem?"

Maimonides writes that one must give *tzedakah* — charity with a joyous countenance and that giving with a disgruntled demeanor negates the *mitzvah*. It is not enough to do *chesed* — kindness, one must **love** *chesed*.

More than any other positive *mitzvah*, writes Maimonides, *tzedakah* is a sign of the essence

of a Jew. By commanding us to bring one tenth of our crops to Jerusalem to rejoice there, G-d taught us two vital lessons. First, that our material prosperity is a gift from G-d, and He can dictate how we use it. Secondly, that using material wealth in the way prescribed by G-d generates feelings of joy and sanctity.

Once we have internalized these lessons in the first two years of the cycle, we can give from our wealth to the poor in the third year — not perfunctorily, but with a true love of *chesed*.

LOVE of the LAND

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

The Critical Condition

Upon arrival in the Land of Israel after 40 years in the wilderness, the entire Jewish People were commanded to assemble at Mount Gerizim and Mount Eval to publicly hear the Torah's blessings for those who fulfill the laws of G-d and the curses for those who disre-

gard them. After each blessing, the people on Mount Gerizim answered, "Amen." After each curse, those on Mount Eval answered, "Amen."

In explaining why this was necessary so soon upon their arrival, the Torah tells us: "*For you are crossing the Jordan to come and inherit the land which G-d is giving you, and you shall inherit it and dwell in it. And you will observe all of the statutes and laws which I place before you today.*"

In these verses is spelled out clearly the formula for successful conquest and possession of the Land of Israel. In order that we should be allowed to inherit and remain in the Land, the Torah tells us that we must observe all of G-d's laws. Otherwise, the Land will "spit out" the Jewish People. It was therefore necessary to dramatically communicate a public declaration of blessings and curses upon entry into the Land, to drive home the message that possession of the Land is conditional on observance of the commandments.

ETHICS of our FATHERS

*“Be a disciple of Aaron — one who loves peace,
one who pursues peace, one who loves people
and who brings them closer to Torah.”*

Whenever Aaron met a sinful person as he walked along his way, he would greet him. The next day the same fellow, contemplating a sin, would say to himself: “If I do this, how will I face Aaron? I’d be so ashamed after the greeting he gave me.” From the respectful way that Aaron, the brother of Moses and high-priest of

the Tabernacle, would greet someone, that person would refrain from behaving sinfully.

When two people had a dispute, Aaron would approach one of them separately and say to him: “What’s going on with your friend? He’s pounding his chest, tearing his clothes and saying ‘Woe to me for how can I look at my friend’s face; I am so ashamed because it was I who wronged him.’” Aaron would continue in this way until he had completely removed all hostility from him. Then he would go to the other one and say the same things to him.

The next time the two unsuspecting quarrelers would meet in the street, they would embrace each other, apologize, and resume their friendship.

Response Line

The Wall of the West?

Hillel Gershuni wrote:

Can you tell me the historical and emotional significance of the Western Wall and the Temple Mount to the Jewish people today? Why do they go, what do they get from visiting? Can anyone go? Thank you.

Dear Hillel,

The Holy Temple was the place where G-d’s Presence was manifest among the Jewish People in ancient Israel. In the Holy Temple itself, the Divine Presence was most manifest in the western part. The ark containing the “two tablets” was in the west, and the western lamp of

the menorah burned miraculously for centuries.

Even though the Temple was destroyed, the Western Wall remains until this day. This was foretold by the Midrash which states “*the Western Wall will never be destroyed, because the Divine Presence is manifest in the west.*”

The history of this site goes back much further than the Temple. Our sources state that this was the place where Abraham offered his son Isaac, and it was here that Jacob received the vision of the ladder. It was from this place that G-d took the earth from which He fashioned Adam, and it is the center of the universe, the point from which the universe was created.

Therefore, the Western Wall has a powerful spiritual and emotional pull on all humanity. People from all over the world are drawn there to interface with their souls’ deepest yearnings.

Besides its spiritual significance, the Temple Mount is also of historical and archeological interest. Most of the western and southern walls of the Temple Mount date back to Herod’s renovation of the Temple. There is a possibility that the lowest levels of these walls are from King Solomon’s Temple. The northern wall dates back to Herod and the eastern wall is from the Second Temple of Nechemia, with some additions by the Hasmonean dynasty and some renovations by Herod.

Some of the stones are incredibly heavy, the transporting of which would have been extremely difficult. One of the stones is said to weigh approximately 628 tons! Archeological evidence indicates that the enormous stones were transported by rolling them on logs that were placed under the stones.

It is actually possible to see the Western Wall on the Internet! Just go to: www.virtual.co.il and click on “KotelKam”.