



A Jewish State in the Land of Israel

Sadly, we tend to take this phenomenon – modern-day Israel – for granted.

Yom HaAtzmaut is the perfect time to take a step back and reflect upon the magnitude of the event we are celebrating.

Rabbi Yaakov Emden, son of the Chacham Tzvi, also known as “*Ya'avetz*,” was a leading German Rabbi in the 18th century. A prolific writer, he published 31 works including a commentary on the “*Siddur Beit Ya'akov*.” In the introduction to the commentary, “*Sulam Beit El*,” Rabbi Emden writes strong words regarding the Jewish people and the Land of Israel.

After relating that one should face Jerusalem while praying, he writes: “And because of this, every single Jew must make a commitment in his heart to go up and move to the Land of Israel, and to desire to merit to pray there before the Sanctuary of the King because even though it is destroyed, G-d's Presence has not moved from there... Therefore, listen to me, my brothers who are living in lands that are not ours, on impure lands, remember this: remember G-d, and Jerusalem should enter your hearts... and don't think to remain in the Diaspora, G-d forbid... ‘For Zion's sake, I will not be quiet’...and ‘for the sake of Jerusalem I will not be silent’ (Yeshayahu 62:1)... In truth, a strong question exists on the holy Jewish people. In every area, they are strict upon themselves with regard to some details of *mitzvot* which they took upon themselves, and they are extra careful about them, loosely spending a lot of money and going through great effort to fulfill them as completely as possible. So why do

they disgrace and are lazy with this beloved *mitzvah* (living in Israel) which is a peg upon which the entire Torah depends?”

Rabbi Emden continues with this theme later on in his commentary. The second blessing of *Birkat HaMazon*, “*Nodeh Lecha*,” reads: “We give thanks to you, L-rd our G-d, for giving our forefathers as an inheritance a Land that is desirable, good and expansive. And for taking us



out, L-rd our G-d, from the land of Egypt, and redeeming us from a house of slavery...” This list of gifts for which we thank G-d seems to be out of order. Shouldn't we first thank G-d for taking us out of Egypt, then for giving us the Torah, and lastly for giving us the Land of Israel? That would be the correct chronological sequence.

Rabbi Emden answers: “The inheritance of the Land of Israel comes first from the perspective of the goal... The entire purpose of the Exodus was to enter the Land.” That, he explains, is where we can accept and connect to

G-d in a complete manner. Therefore, we thank G-d for the ultimate goal first, and only afterwards we thank Him for the means which enabled us to reach that goal.

Despite the passion Rabbi Emden expresses for living in Israel, circumstances did not permit him to make *aliyah* himself. However, in a lesson for all those who are not able to make *aliyah*, he strongly urged his own children to do so in his introduction to the *siddur*: “And you, my children who G-d has given me with grace...listen... to what I instruct you regarding the Land of Israel... when you have in your hands blessing for the costs of the trip and to have some standing for a livelihood there even if it's just a small amount... turn and travel to the Holy Land to live there permanently... and G-d won't remove His kindness from you when you return to the Land of your forefathers.”

This is what Rabbi Emden taught his children in a time when both travel to Israel and living in Israel were filled with the greatest of dangers, and in an era when Jewish life was not flourishing in the Holy Land.

One can only imagine how he would have celebrated the establishment of an independent Jewish State and how strongly he would have educated his children to move to a free, strong and vibrant Israel.

How blessed we are to live in these magnificent times!

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