



Eretz Yisrael in Chassidut

Shoshana Judelman

spent months davening to Hashem and begging for His help.

After an entire year, Rabbi Avraham Dov emerged from his seclusion and expressed gratitude that the *meshulach* had spoken to him so forcefully. “Because of the strength of his words, I worked so hard to be worthy and, indeed, I now see that his words were true, the rocks of Eretz Yisrael are truly precious gems.”

How can we tap into the energy of seeing like the Bat Ayin, with our hearts and souls instead of with only our physical senses? How can we even begin to tap into the energy of Eretz Yisrael?

We know that what we see with our eyes is not the whole picture; we see the material world around us but not the deeper truth beneath the surface. We learn from the prophets that “the whole world is filled with His Glory,” (Isaiah 6:3) that our mission in life is to seek out the G-dliness that is hidden in every aspect of existence.

In the *Shema*, the Torah tells us not to “wander after your hearts and after your eyes after which you are going astray.” The Sfat Emet points out that according to Rashi, the Torah’s use of “wander,” which derives from the same linguistic root as the instruction to the spies to “scout out the Land,” teaches us that the eyes and the heart are the “spies” of the body. When a person sees everything on a materialistic level, they are in danger of falling prey to superficial temptations and a skewed view of the world. True sight comes from a life spent connecting to the One Above and continuously working towards personal growth. With enough persistence, we can grow an appreciation for depth over beauty, experiences over objects, and love over ego. We might even catch a glimpse of the shining spark of G-dliness that Hashem puts in everything and everyone.

The very air of Eretz Yisrael can help strengthen our ability to see G-dliness because, as we learn from the Gemara, “the air of Eretz Yisrael makes one wise.” (Bava Batra 158b) Rebbe Nachman of Breslov teaches that this is so because “the eyes of G-d Almighty are continually upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end” (Devarim 11:12) and eyes signify awareness and wisdom. Eretz Yisrael is filled with His presence, but our ability to feel it depends on our deeds, our davening, and our continuous efforts to come closer to Him.

One of Israel’s most confusing and heart-breaking sites is the Kotel, where our holy *Beit HaMikdash* should but does not yet stand. And yet, it is there that we go to daven and pour out our hearts to The One Above because it is a spiritual window of potential connection, a gateway through which the *tefillot* of the whole world ascend together to the Heavenly Throne above. If we open our hearts, we can feel the tears, gratitude and yearning of generations past and present.

May Hashem bless each one of us this year with renewed courage to seek deeper relationships and the strength to keep *davening* for them. May He bless us to harness the power of possibility and connection of Eretz Yisrael to see beyond the physical to the precious gems in one another.

Shoshana Judelman teaches Chassidut for Shiviti Women’s Institute in Jerusalem and in the Shirat David Community in Efrat, and guides at Yad Vashem. Shoshana holds a BA in History and an MA in Jewish History. She lived around the world, including in New Jersey, Western Australia and Pennsylvania before settling in Israel in 2013.

The Bat Ayin, Rabbi Avraham Dov of Avritch, had always yearned to live in *Eretz HaKodesh*. One day, a tzedakah collector arrived from Tzfat and the Bat Ayin asked him about living in Eretz Yisrael. “It is so beautiful,” responded the *meshulach*, “that even the rocks and stones are like precious gems!” Upon hearing these words, the Bat Ayin could no longer hold back and, in 1830 at the age of 65, he made Aliyah.

A year later he met that same *meshulach* in Tzfat. “And?” asked the *meshulach*, eagerly awaiting Rabbi Avraham Dov’s reaction. “Indeed, our Land is wonderful and holy as you described,” observed the Bat Ayin, “but when you said the stones are like gems, that was an exaggeration!” The *meshulach* stared at Rabbi Avraham Dov and declared, “Whoever is worthy sees it!” Upon hearing these words, Rabbi Avraham Dov secluded himself and