

Tefillah Focus Of The Week:

וכרות

Keeping a Promise

MEANING: The simple translation of the prayer

And You established the covenant with him to give the land of Canaanite, Hittite... to give it to his offspring; and You affirmed Your word, for You are righteous...but their pursuers You hurled into the depths, like a stone into turbulent waters.

וכרות עמו הברית
לתת את ארץ
הכנעני החתי... לתת
לזרעו, ותקם את דברך, כי
צדיק אתה.... ואת רדפיהם
השלכת במצולת כמו אבן
במים עזים:

WORD TO THE WISE: Meaning within the word

In the Torah, the land, Eretz Yisroel, was “given” several times to Avraham Avinu and to his offspring. The land was pledged to Avraham and his children when Hashem tells Avraham (Bereishis 13: 15, 17), “For all the land that you see I will give to you and to your seed forever.” It was given specifically to Avraham in the verse, “Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth, for to you will I give it.” The land was “given” again to Avraham’s offspring (Ibid, 12:7) with the words, “Hashem appeared to Avram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” (Iyun Tefillah)

It is important to note that Hashem does not

promise that they will always possess the land. However, it will belong to them always; Israel and the land are destined for each other forever.

(Rav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch, ibid,13:15).

Rav Hirsch (Ibid, 12:7) further explains that this land is special. In this land, or its vicinity, the Garden of Eden was located. This land was spared from the catastrophe of the flood (Bereishis Rabbah 32:10). Although Avraham had devoted 75 years of his life to G-d, and he had worked and suffered for G-d, nevertheless, it was only when he reached this land that G-d appeared to him for the first time. This was Hashem’s means of indicating that He had chosen this land, and that in this land, His Presence, the Shechinah, would dwell.

THEME:

An essential concept of the prayer

Deed to the Land

Hashem gave the Jewish people the Land of Israel, but it depends on the condition that we observe the Torah’s commandments.

INSIGHT:

Deeper meanings of the theme

Renewal from Destruction

The verse tells us וְכִרְוֹת עַמּוֹ הַבְּרִית לַתּוֹת אֶת אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי, Hashem established the covenant with Avraham to give the land to the Children of Israel. However, with the blessings comes a great responsibility to uphold the laws of the Torah. As long as the Jews treasure and keep the Torah, they will be entitled to possess the land of Israel. Should they abandon the Torah, then they will be compelled to abandon their homeland.

This connection between the blessing of the Holy Land and adherence to the Torah is made clear in the Prophet Yeshayah’s (6:10-11) vision. “This people’s heart is becoming fat and his ears are becoming heavy, his eyes are becoming sealed, lest he see with his eyes, and hear with his ears ...the cities will be desolate without inhabitants and the houses without people. The land lies waste and desolate.”

Yet, the vision contains a beautiful metaphor. Describing the utter desolation of the land, the verse says, “G-d will remove the people far away; the midst of the land shall be desolate... the entire land will go and become barren like an elm and an oak that have discarded their leaves (in the fall) and have but a trunk, the holy seed is its trunk” (Yeshayah 6:12-13). What is meant by this comparison of Israel to a tree in the fall that has no leaves but “the holy seed is its trunk”?

In the winter, trees appear to be dead. The leaves have fallen away. The wood is frozen. One seeing this for the first time would not be able to conceive that in the spring the tree will come back to life.

The picture of desolation and gloom was vividly painted by the Ramban when he first came to Jerusalem in 1267. He composed an emotional letter to his son. “What can I tell you about this

land other than that it is desolate and bare? The holier the site, the more desolate it is. Jerusalem is the most desolate of them all.” Ramban continues to describe that the buildings were in ruins and the city was abandoned. There was no minyan, no synagogue, and no Sefer Torah in the city. Yeshayah’s prophecy of gloom had been fulfilled.

The Ramban was determined to bring the holy city back to life. He took possession of one of the ruins and proclaimed it to be a synagogue. He encouraged Jews to come to the city. He had Sifrei Torah brought from Tsfat. From that determined beginning, Jerusalem was revived from the dead, just like the tree in Yeshayah’s vision.

Today, Jerusalem is a thriving, vibrant city. The sounds of Torah are heard in its countless yeshivas. The voice of prayer is heard in the synagogues that fill the city. And the synagogue that the Ramban founded almost 750 years ago is still there.

Yeshayah prophesied shortly before the exile of the Ten Tribes to the north. When the exile occurred, everyone thought that the end of the Jewish people was at hand. There have been times in our history when the Jews abandoned the Torah way of life. It seemed as though there was no hope for the future. G-d, through Yeshayah’s prophecy, is telling us that there will always be present in our midst, righteous Jews who can revitalize the Jewish Nation. Just as there was the Ramban in his generation, each one of us should do his part to invigorate the holy seed within ourselves and help bring the arrival of the ultimate “holy seed,” the Mashiach. (Adapted from “Thinking Outside The Box,” by Rabbi Yochanan Kirshblum, Parshas Yisro, 2004, Torah.org.)

VISUALIZE:

Images that bring the prayer to life

The Construction Site

When passersby walk past the Klein family’s lot of land, they see a ruin. An old house sits on the lot, its windows boarded up, its shingles falling off and its concrete stairs crumbling. The land is bare, except for patches of tall, ragged weeds and bits of refuse that have blown onto the property. People shake their heads and wonder – why is such a valuable property sitting in ruins?



But when the Klein family walks past the lot on their frequent visits from their home city, they see the blueprints sitting on a large table in their house. They see the family home that will one day sit upon that land. They can imagine Shabbos meals in the expansive dining room, the Sukkah on the wide deck

overlooking the landscaped yard, the children playing in the family room. What appears to be a neglected, vacant lot to others is to them a future home. The land is theirs, and it’s only a matter of time until its true purpose is revealed.

Likewise, regardless of the physical condition of the Land of Israel, it is eternally ours. Knowing that gives us the ability to love it, attach to it and envision it as it someday will be.

Try This!

► If you have ever been to Yerushalayim, picture a city scene – a street teeming with Jews, packed with shuls, yeshivos, Jewish stores, vibrant with Jewish life. (If you haven’t been there, think of a picture you have seen.) Imagine this scene when you say **וכרות עמו הברית לתת את ארץ**.

Did You Know

► **Avraham’s Reward**

In the Book of Nechemiah, וְכִרְוֹת is not the beginning of a new verse, but a continuation of the end of the previous section, ומצאת את לבבו, וְכִרְוֹת עַמּוֹ הַבְּרִית, that in reward for Avraham’s faithfulness, G-d made a covenant with him. However, the practice, which is almost universally applied in siddurim, is to begin a new paragraph with וְכִרְוֹת עַמּוֹ הַבְּרִית.