

Shabbat Ekev

August 4, 2018

Daat Zkenim on Deut 11:10

לא כארץ מצרים, “not like the land of Egypt; that land is a flat land lacking mountains and therefore enables its inhabitants to draw water from the Nile river through digging canals to the land surrounding the river. The Jewish people when in their ancestral land, by contrast, will have to depend on the rain to irrigate their land. As a result they will realize the need for their God being well disposed towards them as else God might withhold the required rainfall at the appropriate time for securing their success in the fields. Your fulfilling God’s commandments at the appropriate times, will insure that God grants rain at the appropriate time in the appropriate quantities.

Rabbeinu Bachya, Deut 11:10

. לא כארץ מצרים היא, “it is not like the land of Egypt;” a land which depends on manual irrigation, i.e. though water is always available it must be brought by man to the fields. The land of Canaan receives its irrigation directly from heaven, through rainfall, not requiring man to bend down and to do back-breaking labor. As long as you observe the laws of the Torah God will provide this rainfall for you and the land will produce its yield. If not, (verse 17) God will lock the heaven and there will not be any rain, hence no crops either. . . Seeing that the land of Israel, as opposed to the land of Egypt, consists of mountains and valleys, an absence of rain means that whatever moisture there had been before will run off much faster than in a flat land like Egypt in which the moisture is retained longer. Sick people need to possess some merit in order to regain their health. Similarly, if Israel or the land of Israel becomes “sick” as evidenced by an absence of rain, it has to acquire some merits to be healed, i.e. for God to make the rain descend again.

Rashbam on Deuteronomy 11:10

Being constantly under the detailed scrutiny of Adonai, your God, to ensure that you will have the necessary rainfall at the right time in the right amount, makes you aware of the need to conduct yourself so that He approves of you.

Or HaChaim on Deuteronomy 11:13

In view of previous statements to the effect that the reward for performance is not paid in this life, Moses assures the people if their service is of a quality that is equivalent to their loving God with all their heart then they will also experience compensation in this life. . . . Receiving rainfall at the appropriate time is not the reward for their performance but is something additional. The reward itself is stored up for the Hereafter

Rashi on Deuteronomy 11:13

TO LOVE ADONAI — This means that you should not say: Well, I will learn, but in order that I may become rich, in order that I may obtain the title Rabbi, in order that I may receive a prize, — but whatever you do, do it out of love for God (**Sifrei Devarim 41:23**), and ultimately the honor which you desire will certainly come (**Nedarim 62a**).

Rabbi Reuven Firestone

The message seems to contradict our understanding of nature and weather: if you obey God's commandments nature will be good to you, but if you stray and serve other gods the Eternal will punish you through acts of nature.

We know much more today about how the weather works than did the ancients. We are aware of what causes drought or its opposite in intense flooding. It may feel silly to pray for God to bring rain to us in our little corner of the earth when we know that climatic movements are huge and affect large parts of our world all at once. El Nino may bring much rain to California, but the very same El Nino causes drought in Southeast Asia and Australia. It is not an issue of personal prayer. Such supplications have no impact on nature.

I would suggest a different understanding.

Our duty to God is also a duty to nature, to the world created in all its beauty by a beautiful, caring God. . . .And nature is sustained by God's commandments, the command of water vapor condensing in clouds to produce rain, of gravity that pulls water down in rivulets to streams into rivers and then oceans, of photosynthesis that splits water atoms into hydrogen and oxygen, and energy to produce sugars that build plants, which provide food. Nature functions through the divine commands of Creation. Commandment is the driving force of existence. . . .

If we truly listen, yes, really heed God's commandments to protect the earth through reasonable consumption, by being modest in our exploitation of nature. . . . if we serve God with all our heart and soul by utilizing clean energy and preserving our precious natural resources — our God-given natural resources — then we will be blessed with a world in which climate change will not shut up the skies or release rain in torrents, both of which are increasing causes of natural disaster throughout the world.

Rabbi Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*

"God does not cause our misfortunes. . . . Some are caused by bad luck, some are caused by bad people, and some are simply an inevitable consequence of our being human and being mortal, living in a world of inflexible natural laws."