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## Streets of Gold

In this week's *parashah*, Moshe Rabbeinu tells the Jewish people that they are finally ready to enter Eretz Yisrael. He encourages them that, only if they follow the commandments of Hashem, they will be permitted to remain there.

Then he describes the beauty and the positive qualities of the land itself, as stated:

כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מְבִיאֲךָ אֶל-אֶרֶץ טוֹבָה אֶרֶץ גְּחָלִי מַיִם עֵינַת וּתְהַלְמַת יִצְאִים  
בְּבִקְעָה וּבְהָר אֶרֶץ חֹשֶׁה וְשַׁעֲרָה וְגִפְסוֹ וְתַאֲנָה וְרִמּוֹן אֶרֶץ-גִּת שָׂמֶן וְדָבָשׁ:

“For Hashem your G-d is bringing you to a good land. A land with streams of water, of springs and underground water coming forth in valley and mountain. A land of wheat, barley, grapes, fig, pomegranate, oil olives, and date honey. A land where you will eat bread without poverty, you will lack nothing there; a land whose stones are iron and from whose mountains you will mine copper; you will eat, be satiated, and bless Hashem your G-d” (*Devarim* 8:7).

The *Talmud* (*Brachos* 41a) derives practical *halachos* from the specific words and order of these *pesukim*. The seven fruits mentioned—the *shivas haminin*—form the basis of many Torah measurements. For example, the olive – a *kezayis* – is the minimum size used for many positive and negative *mitzvos*. One is forbidden to eat an olive-sized piece of non-kosher food (and will be punished upon doing so), and one should be particular to eat an olive-sized piece of *matzah* and *marror* on Pesach, to name a few.

The order in which the *shivas haminin* are written teaches us the practical laws of which *brachos* to make first when a

variety of foods are placed before us. When one sits to eat, he should first make the *brachah* on the more special fruit, and that depends on where it is written relative to the word “a land” in this *passuk*. So, we see that the placement of the words in the *passuk* counts, too.

However, the commentators are troubled by this *passuk*. They ask why Eretz Yisrael was praised with the production of iron and copper and not with the production of gold and silver. If you wanted to praise a country, wouldn't you speak about its diamond mines, its gold reserves, its luxurious resources? As the old phrase goes, “the streets are paved with gold.” That's the sign of a land flowing with wealth. So why settle for mundane resources such as iron and copper?



SITTING FROM RIGHT TO LEFT: R' SHMUEL ALTAR (LIKUTEI BASAR LIKUTEI), R' SIMCHAH ELBERG, R' DOVID LIFSHITZ, R' YITZCHAK HUTNER, CHOSSON, R' CHAIM YOSEF LEB ARNEST, R' SHMUEL KALMAN MIRSKY.

The answer is that the Torah is teaching us something far deeper. When Hashem praises Eretz Yisrael, He doesn't focus on what dazzles the eye or fills a bank account. Instead, He highlights the basics—the materials essential to build vessels, tools, and infrastructure. Iron and copper are necessary for daily life. Gold is decorative; copper is functional.

In the *sefer Likutei Basar Likutei*, Harav Shmuel Alter writes that from here, we learn what it means to live a meaningful life: appreciate the necessities, not just the luxuries.

In the story of King Midas, everything he touched turned to gold. He thought it was a great blessing, until his food – and his daughter – also turned to gold (see Maharsha, *Baba Basra* 25b). Instead of constantly looking and trying to get more and more luxuries, stop and appreciate the basic necessities that you have: a roof over your head, food on your plate, health in your body, and peace in your home—you are rich. The Torah is whispering: “Don't chase the glitz. Cherish the ground you're standing on – not the latest model of a fancy car that is driving on it.

This also reminds us to take care of the fundamentals that define who we are – both as human beings and as Jews. It's not just about appreciating basics—it's about building your life on them. A powerful story is told about a great rav who sent his son to a distant yeshivah. To make sure that the boy was following the right path and not wasting his time there, he made the long journey to visit. He entered his son's dorm room, exchanged just a few words, took a brief look around, and left.

His driver saw the small pleasantries between father and son and was baffled. “That's it? You came all this way and didn't even quiz him?

What if he's wasting time or just pretending to learn?”

The rav smiled. “I didn't need to test him. I saw everything I needed to see. The bed was made. The *sefarim* were in order. His room had the quiet dignity of a *ben Torah*. If he's living with order and discipline, his learning is surely the same.”

Sometimes a neat bed says it all. A clean shirt, a tidy desk, a respectful tone—these aren't extras. They're the *yesod*, the foundation. They are the copper and iron of a Jewish life.

The saying is, “If you want to change the world, start off by making your bed.”

The way we conduct ourselves is a reflection of who we are. A neat bed, an orderly room, and a clean shirt mirror our behavior and *middos*. These things might not have great splash and pizzazz, but they are the foundation of our character. Conducting ourselves in the proper way gives us the opportunity to shine as Jews.

Before we dream of building spiritual skyscrapers, we have to lay concrete blocks: *davening* on time, showing up for *sefer*, honoring parents, making *brachos* with *kavanah*.

Before a student volunteers for an extra *chessed* program, they should ask, “Does Mommy need help first?” Before a *bochur* stays up all night learning, he should ask, “Did I use my regular *seferim* properly?”

This is a very important lesson. Do the *ikur* first. The fundamentals are most important. Gold is shiny—but it doesn't hold up walls. Iron and copper do. Hashem is promoting the materials that are useful and necessary for all.

## ר' שמואל אלטער

R' Shmuel Alter

was born in 1885 in Lvov. His father lived near the *Shoel Umeishev*. R' Shmuel's brother was R' Moshe Elchanan, who was head *dayan* in Lvov; he passed away in 1941. Tragically, R' Moshe Elchanan's mother, wife, and eight children were killed in WWII, *Hy"d*.

R' Shmuel received *semichah* from R' Meir Arik and R' Brody, of Lvov. He was a Rav in Vienna before World War II. He and his wife were married for fourteen years before they were blessed with their only child, a girl, Chaya Sara. Sadly, she passed away at the age of eighteen, 12 Nisan 1942, shortly after they reached Cuba, having become ill on the ship as they fled Nazi Europe.

Rav Shmuel began publishing *sefarim* in Cuba in 1945 and eventually moved to the United States, where he continued his Torah work. He authored twenty volumes and was *niftar* on 17 Kislev, 1969.