

Rabbi Sholom Gold

Rabbi Gold served as Rabbi of Young Israel of West Hempstead, Long Island, NY. He made aliya in 1982 and built and founded Kehilat Zichron Yosef, Young Israel of Har Nof and the Avrum Silver Jerusalem College for Adults. Rabbi Gold lectures widely in Eretz Yisroel.

The Prologue

A few months ago our family gathered for a Shabbaton in Migdal five kilometers north of Tverya. While sitting on the lawn before Mincha, Saba (that's me) took the opportunity to have a schmooze with his grandchildren. With the majestic Mount Arbel rising to the north and the glistening Kinneret to the East and a cool breeze rustling through the trees, I sat with them to share some thoughts.

It seems like it was just yesterday that I was playing punch ball in Williamsburg, NY on Wilson Street, envying those who could hit "three sewers," and playing "Johnny on the Pony" in front of 616 Bedford Avenue- the Agudah Synagogue. Now, a lifetime later, when one wonders what we really accomplished in life, I was facing a fine group of young people who were eager to hear what Saba had to tell them.

The Shmooze

My father died in 1981 in Yerushalayim when I was on Sabbatical from the Young Israel of West Hempstead, NY. He had lived with us for the last 10 years of his life and he was buried in the old cemetery on Har HaZeisim. He left very few material possessions. He didn't own a house or an apartment, not a car (he never drove), no stocks, bonds, or monetary instruments of any sort, no significant savings. He was a factory worker his whole life- he cut leather for ladies' shoes. But his job didn't define him or in any way capture his essence. After a hard day's work he would sit down by a Gemora to prepare the class for congregants that he gave on Shabbos in Yeshiva Torah Vodaath for thirty-six years. Talmidei Chachamim, scholars, and plain good Jews would regularly attend the class. He didn't teach the "easy mesechtos" but rather tackled the tough ones. He taught Eruvin and prepared his own diagrams painstakingly with a pencil that he would use down to the bottom. When nothing was left of it he would start a new one.

He was born in Ropschitz in Galicia; my mother was born in Kolboshuv; and they married in America in the 20's. During the Depression my father was unemployed for two years and finally was granted an interview for a job at a factory not far from Williamsburg. The interview was scheduled for Shabbos. He was considering going to the meeting because he could walk there and would therefore not entail any desecration of Shabbos. My mother said emphatically: "Yiddel, you will not go. If it's bashert for you, you'll get the job if you go on Monday." He went on Monday, got the job and worked there for thirty-six years, until he retired.

So when he passed away in Yerushalayim he left nothing - or so it seemed. He had a little orange-colored suitcase with not much in it that had accompanied him for many years. I once had a peek in it and saw old invitations to his three sons' wed-

dings, newspaper clippings about us (all three were Rabbis) and nothing much else.

I had forgotten about his little suitcase until I came across it some while after he died and decided to go through it. It was in fact the usual collection of yellowing, brownish papers, and curled black and white pictures... But then, I came across an envelope. I opened it and took out a letter in an advanced state of aging, holes at the folds, and read it. I remained silent for a long time after reading it. "Nechadim, today I want to tell you the story of the letter, because it has had great impact on your parents and grandparents, and has formed the structure and essence of your lives. This letter may even explain to you a great deal about your Saba (me) and Savta. So here goes.


The Letter

The letter was written by Dr. S. Bernstein, Director, Palestine Bureau of the Zionist Organization of America to Mr. Gold, 91 Lee Avenue in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, NY. Old timers may remember that 91 Lee was between Rodney and Keap Streets and came down when they built the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway. Dr. Bernstein informs my father that, "We are in receipt of a letter from the Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency in Palestine in Jerusalem (dated July 30, 1946, ref. # 10474/G), wherein they inform us that you and your family have been duly registered for Palestine certificates." That's the good news and the end of the first paragraph.

The letter continues: "However, owing to the complete lack of certificates at the present time, there is no possibility for them to do anything in your case now." End of second paragraph. Now comes the third and final paragraph- "the hope."

"Let us hope that in the not distant future an adequate number of certificates will be at their disposal, so that all of those desiring to go to Palestine will be enabled to do so.

Sincerely yours, Dr. S. Bernstein,"



Jewish people clamoring to go home...

It is so important for you to know this history so that you can appreciate the dramatic changes in our world.

The Hope

The letter's final paragraph expressed "the hope" that there will be sufficient "certificates" to allow all who wish to come to do so. Dr. Bernstein couldn't have imagined that less than two years later, the British would be gone, thrown out by Jewish resistance and a State of Israel would come into being. No certificates, no blockades, no unseaworthy boats, but a flood of Jews flowing from all over the world - going home. This was the outpouring of HaShem's great kindness and the fulfillment of the promise to Rachel Imeinu - "The children shall return to their boundaries." (Yirmiyahu 31,16)

In 1995 I was interviewed by the BBC from London. They wanted to know what my opinion was of the Oslo II Accords that had just been approved. I told them that His Majesty's government had issued a White Paper in 1939 that would ultimately close Palestine to all Jews. Less than ten years later, the White Paper had joined the garbage heap of history as hundreds of thousands of Jews poured into Israel.

So it would be with Oslo II. I can't imagine that they ever aired that interview - but I certainly enjoyed saying it.

Conclusion

It was nearly time to go to Minchah and I concluded: So my children and grandchildren remember the letter and its significance. Never ever

lose sight of a great commentary of Rashi that sums it all up. "And it will be when HaShem will bring you to the land of the Canaanites as He swore to you and your forefathers and He will give it to you" (Shmos 13:11). Rashi comments on the end of the posuk....: "and He will give it to you."

"The Land should be considered in your eyes as if it has been given to you on that very day (i.e., every day) and it should not be considered in your eyes as an inheritance received from ancestors." The Land should never ever be taken for granted.

Not only were Saba and Savta Rabba Gold great lovers of Eretz Yisroel, but in equal measure, Saba and Savta Rabba Rubinoff - your Savta's parents also were. Then above all, your Savta had an uncle, Yeshaya Rubinoff, H"YD (Saba Rabba's younger brother) who, in 1949, at age 22, left Toronto to help defend Eretz Yisroel from the Arab invaders. He fought bravely for ten weeks until he fell in battle. That is the true mesiras nefesh - self sacrifice for his people and his Land. He will never be forgotten. May his memory be a blessing.

So children, this is a brief story that I pray will stay with you for the rest of your lives. My father, a"n didn't leave stocks, bonds, annuities, savings, or land. He left the Land of Israel as an eternal inheritance. He bequeathed it to me and I, in turn, am bequeathing it to you.....my descendants.

The Torah calls both Torah and Eretz Yisroel "Morasha" (heritage). That's much more than "Yerusha." (inheritance). It means that we are expected to acquire the Land anew and make it a better place spiritually and materially. Kinderlach, you have your work cut out for you !!