

Walking Upright in Lisbon

Vayikra 26: 13 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves; and I have broken the bars of your yoke, and made you go upright (*Kommemeyiut*)

Rashi on *Kommemeyiut*: *B'komah Zekufah* (with an upright standing or posture)

Vayikra 27:1-2 And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: **2** Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When a man shall clearly utter a vow of persons unto the LORD, according to your valuation...

This week's sidra has three parts. The first is the bracha we receive if follow Hashem's covenant, ending with the Divine promise for walking upright. This is followed by the *Tochecha*, the "curses" and dire consequences of not following the covenant. After all this is a rather arcane section known as "*Erechin*", an ancient Temple-oriented fundraising strategy using pledges of the "worth" of a person. What connects them? And why did the Torah follow the *Tochecha* with *Erechin*?

I would suggest the Torah is trying to remind us that even after the worst suffering, the direst conditions, we are still worthy in God's eyes. And we should be worthy in our own.

This idea came to me quite graphically during my recent trip to Portugal with my mother. It was an amazing trip, and I hope I will have opportunities to share the details with you over time. But among the more emotional and significant moments were the Yom Hazikaron (in the presence of the Israeli ambassador) and Yom Ha-atzmaut services at Shaarei Tikva, the only shul in Lisbon. To be able to sing *B'komah Zekufah* about being a free people in our own land, about the hope that lasted two thousand years in Portugal was incredibly moving. This was especially true knowing that on Portuguese soil, it was forbidden on pain of death to openly practice Judaism for several hundred years. How could one not feel the pathos and emotion? I told my mother at that moment that had there been a Jewish state, perhaps the Jewish expulsion from Portugal, the subsequent persecution and the forced conversions to Christianity would have taken a different route.

We have to thank Hashem for allowing us as Jews to live in an era where we can walk *B'komah Zekufah*, to know that as Jews and human beings, we still have worth before Hashem and in each other's eyes, even after the Inquisition and the Holocaust.

Shabbat Shalom!

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