

"Son of man, set thy face....

And drop thy word towards the South

And prophesy against the forest of the south field"
(Ezekiel, XX:2)

Southwards

In the south and in the Negev stood the cradle of our people; these are the country's weak points and danger zones; they are also its greatest hope.

When our ancestor Abraham was commanded to leave his country and his kindred and his father's house in Ur of the Chaldees and go to the Promised land, he journeyed constantly towards the South, and after hunger compelled him to go to Egypt, he again returned to the Negev. For a time, Abraham pitched his tent in the plains of Mamre near Hebron, since the arid land in the South could not sustain both Abraham and Lot, for both of them had much substance - sheep and cattle. But after the overthrow of Sodom was, Abraham returned "to the land of the Negev, and dwelt between Kadesh and between Shur, and sojourned in Gerar." (Genesis, 20:I)

Abraham's neighbors were Philistines who had settled in the Southwest, and the Father of the Hebrews made a covenant with them after the quarrels in connection with the well he dug in that barren land. And Abraham called the place Beersheba "because there they both swore" (Genesis, 20:3I).

Our Book of Books excelling in its dramatic minimalism even when dealing with great events, notes in one verse ten words long two acts by Abraham, the combination of which arouses profound astonishment at the wonderful insight of our ancestors. In one breath, the Bible combines an apparently prosaic, everyday act the planting a tree - with the inspired supreme concept which underlies the original world outlook of Judaism: - the concept of a Supreme God. And these are those ten words:

"And he planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God
(Genesis, 2I:33)

Only the ancient Jewish mind was bold and smart enough to combine in one verse and with such concise simplicity two such different and profoundly significant acts.