

The Time Has Come!

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The Land Of Israel

Our connection to Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel) is not solely based on the fact that it is our homeland. There is a reason that it is our homeland. The Almighty created it especially suited to us.

Eretz Yisrael is the land of Clal Yisrael, the land of the nation and community of Israel.

To properly understand our connection to Eretz Yisrael, we first have to know who we are.

We are the nation created by Hashem (G-d) to proclaim His Name in the world. And just as all other nations belong to a particular land, we belong to a particular land. This is part of the order of Creation that this air, these mountains and hills, these stones and plants in this portion of the globe are uniquely connected to us. Just as Hashem chose us from all of the nations, He chose our land from all other lands, "For the L-rd has chosen Zion" (Tehillim, 132:13). The Divinely chosen nature of our nation and of our land is integral to understanding who we are.

Herein lies the difference between Am Yisrael and the nations of the world. We are a nation brought into existence by the Creator of heaven and earth. Our whole nation is holy. All of our meaning and value is as a holy nation, a holy Clal. And the specifically designated place on this planet for this segment of mankind is here in the Land of Israel.

When Jews meet they customarily exchange "shaloms" and ask, "Where do you come from?" The usual response is, "I come from Belgium, I come from Brazil, I come from Colorado. The Rebbe of Obstroytza said, "Every Jew is obliged to answer - I come from Eretz Yisrael." This is a very deep insight telling us that every Jew in his innermost essence belongs to Eretz Yisrael.

Because of our long exile amidst the impurity of the gentile nations, we have become accustomed to think that our life in the Diaspora is normal, and we forget that Eretz Yisrael is our natural, healthy, Divinely-intended place.

Hashem said to Avraham, "Lech Lecha, Get yourself forth..." commanding him to journey to a specific place, "To the land that I will show you." Even without knowing where he was going, Avraham picked up his family and went to find the place where he was to serve Hashem. There is an expression in Latin - ex orient lux - the light comes from the east. So too, spiritual light comes from the East, from our Middle East. From this spot on earth, Hashem educates mankind. To do this, Hashem wants us here in Israel. We don't belong in other places. Haven't we already sufficiently tasted the life in Europe and Auschwitz?

Our Sages teach us that the air of the Land of Israel makes one wise (Baba Batra 158B). It causes intelligence and wisdom. And the beginning of intelligence is to understand that existence among the gentile nations is totally unpleasant.

We mustn't forget that the gentile nations do us a favor by allowing us to stay in their lands - until they expel us. One must realize that we are on foreign soil there. It is not our society, nor government, nor culture. Nothing is ours. Only in Israel are we at home with family, living according to our customs, and our uniquely Jewish year, living in the one place designed for our holiness, for our psychological health, even for our physical wellbeing. We must return to health and turn away from polluted, unhealthy places, from environments that sometimes are so polluted and disorienting that a Jew forgets who he really is and thinks that it is normal to live amongst the gentiles. This is a tragic mistake.

Eretz Yisrael is the land of our life, in every possible way, whether national, historical, social, or personal. The air of Israel is our air. These mountains, these hills, these valleys, Jerusalem, Hevron, and Shechem, both spiritually and physically are bonded to us. And if, due to the routine living of our lives, we forget this connection - this is a catastrophe. It is a tragedy when we fall in love with the exile. It is written in the Torah portion of Mishpatim that after six years, a Hebrew slave must go free. If he refuses, saying, "I loved my master - I won't go out to freedom," this is an awful thing. Likewise, when we fall in love the galut (exile) saying, "I love my master, the foreign nation," this is a tragic mistake.

We need to foster the understanding and the feeling that we must live in Israel, that this is our normal place, in terms of religion, and in terms of our nationhood. If we are not here, we are unhealthy. And from time to time, the gentiles remind us that we are living in their domain, in an alien land.

This must be clear before anything else - no matter where a Jew is, he belongs only to Eretz Yisrael. This is his permanent home. Outside the land, we have the status of guests. For two or three years, it is possible to be there in order to fill a mitzvah, but the aim of our life is to live here.

It is sometimes erroneously thought that living in Israel, conquering her, settling the land, and keeping her under Jewish sovereignty, are only the means for observing a Torah lifestyle in Israel. This is a mistake. The precept of conquering and settling the land is, in itself, a mitzvah prescribed by the Torah to settle the land so that it will not lay in desolation. In Judaism, it is accepted that, among the early Torah authorities, second in importance to the Rambam (Maimonides) is the Ramban (Nachmonides), one of the most outstanding sages and Kabbalists, two things which go hand in hand.

The Ramban concluded that the commandment to settle the Land of Israel is a positive commandment of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah. He based his decision on the language of the verse, "And you shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it" (Bamidbar, 33:53), which is stated in the language of a command. We are enjoined with two tasks: first to possess the land through conquest, and secondly, to dwell in the land (Ramban, Supplement to the "Sefer HaMitzvot" of the Ramban, Positive Commandment #4).

The Ramban clearly establishes that this land which Hashem promised our forefathers must be kept under our control, and not under the control of any other nation. This is clearly meant in a national sense, for everyone understands that

ruling a land means the establishment of a state in that land. Thus the establishment of a Jewish State in the Land of Israel is a fundamental precept of the Torah!

Our Sages have clearly explained the value of Eretz Yisrael to the Torah and to the mitzvot, saying that the precept of living in Eretz Yisrael is equal in scale to all of the precepts of the Torah (Sifre, Ekev, 10:1). The mitzvah of living in Israel is not just an ordinary commandment. It is an all-encompassing precept, encompassing all of the Torah. It is the fundamental prerequisite for Am Yisrael to function as a nation. For the genuine keeping of the Torah is only in Eretz Yisrael. In every other place, the commandments are imposed as a reminder, so that when we return to Israel, we will know how to keep them (See Rashi, Devarim, 11:18; also the Ramban on the Torah, there).

If a young person wants to live in Eretz Yisrael, and his parents refuse to grant permission, the child need not listen. The ruling in the Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah states that if a father tells a child to transgress a positive precept, even a rabbinical ordinance, the child should not listen to him (Yoreh Deah, 240:15).

The precept to live in Israel is a Torah commandment which applies in every generation, to every Jew, even in the time of exile (See Pitchei Tshuva, Even HaEzer, 75:6). Therefore the Beit Din (Jewish court) can compel someone to leave the exile and move to Israel, even from a luxurious home in the Diaspora to a miserable home in Eretz Yisrael; even from a city in the Diaspora where the majority of residents are Jews, to a city in Israel where the majority are idol worshipers (Even HaEzer, 75:3). The Beit Din has this power of compelling someone to move to Israel, not because of the many commandments which one can only perform in the Land, but rather because of the holiness of the Land itself, an eternal holiness that has not changed, nor will ever change for all eternity.

Furthermore, the obligation of moving to Israel is all the more stringent when it stems from a desire to learn Torah in Israel, for "There is no Torah like the Torah of Eretz Yisrael" (Bereshit Rabbah, 16:7). And the study of Torah is greater than the mitzvah of honoring one's father and mother. Concerning the obligation of woman to live in Israel, they are also duty-bound in this mitzvah because of the inherent holiness of Eretz Yisrael, which is the foundation of the obligation to live here.

Israel's wholeness appears only in Eretz Yisrael. The Divine value of this great nation appears only when it is situated in its own land, in all of its national health and stature. The revelation of Hashem's honor in the world comes about through the Jewish nation in its land. When this portion of mankind is situated in this particular land, the Torah is revealed in all of its truth.

The time has come to return home!

The time has come to return home, whether we want to or not, whether we recognize this truth or try to run away from it. Hashem has decreed, "And I will bring them back to their land" (Ezekiel, 36:22). Hashem has decided that the time has arrived. However, when we return, we must realize that our restoration in Israel is not happenstance. This is not a coincidental shaping of history. Rather, we must see Hashem's guiding hand, and his Divine ordering of events for what

they are - the fulfillment of the verse, "When the L-rd brings back the captivity of Zion" (Tehillim, 126:1).

It is the L-rd's glorious spirit that is surrounding the whole House of Israel and bringing us back to our land and our Torah. Each one of you, in your coming to Israel, is a part of this. Hashem is returning His Presence to Zion. How fortunate are we to be a part of this national rebirth! How fortunate are we to be a part of the restoration of our life to its original essence - the national manifestation of Israel, the holy nation. The more we are conscious of the Divine hand in the events of our time, the more we will merit to meet the Almighty who restores His Divine Presence to Zion.

We hope to see you here soon to build Eretz Yisrael, and to be built by her. There are people who are blessed with an immediate Aliyah to Israel, and others who encounter spiritual and physical difficulties along the way. Sometimes coming to Israel for a visit is a preparation for a permanent Aliyah, something that is essential to you and to all of Am Yisrael.