

FROM ISRAEL WITH LOVE

It's Time for Jews to Come Home!

By Tzvi Fishman

Introduction

For almost two thousand years, ever since the Romans razed Jerusalem and exiled the People of Israel from their Land, Jews have been praying to return to Zion. When this dream finally became an actuality with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1947, a surprising thing occurred. While many Jews who had survived the Holocaust in Europe, and Sefardi Jews who had been living in Arab lands, seized the opportunity to immigrate to Israel, Jews from the West, most notably America, preferred to remain in the countries of their Diaspora, choosing to remain a minority in someone else's country, rather than come home to their own Promised Land.

This book is an argument in favor of *aliyah*. The Hebrew word, "*aliyah*," means "an ascent." One speaks about "going up" to Israel. Since Israel is the Holy Land, anyone who moves here from the Diaspora is considered to be on a journey of spiritual ascent. One reason is that in joining the rebuilding of the Nation of Israel in *Eretz Yisrael*, he, or she, is elevating his private, individual life to the much greater life of the "*Clal*," of the Jewish Nation as a whole, as these essays explain.

In addition to lauding the unparalleled blessing of living in the Land of Israel, the essays in this book reject the superficial understanding of Judaism that is taught throughout the Diaspora, which sees Diaspora Judaism as an end in itself, and not what it really is - a punishment of exile in foreign lands until we return to our own Holy Land. Instead of teaching their communities that the goal of each and every Jew should be to live a Torah life in Israel, as is explicitly expressed in our daily prayers, and repeated again and again in the Torah, Jewish leaders and educators in the Diaspora work toward strengthening Jewish life in the exile itself. Because the educational goals of the Jewish establishment

in the Diaspora are misdirected, many of our Jewish brothers and sisters there don't know any better. In their innocence, they believe they are doing the right thing in educating their children to become successful Americans, Frenchmen, or Australians, instead of encouraging them to build their lives in the Jewish homeland. The result of this tragic policy is the growing rate of assimilation that is decimating Jewish communities around the world, except in Israel where assimilation hardly exists.

These essays were written as "blogs" in my column, "Hollywood to the Holy Land," which appears at Israel National News.com. Soon after I began writing my feelings about Israel, I discovered that amongst my wide readership, there were a handful of loud and vehement protestors who took exception to almost everything I said. If I saw something as good, they saw it as bad. If I wrote that something was white, they responded in their "talkbacks" that it was really black. Since the arguments of these anti-*aliyah* "refuseniks" were spiced with vociferous and finely-worded rhetoric that could lead uninitiated readers astray, I often answered in an equally blunt and uncompromising fashion. What resulted was an always lively interchange which forced me to analyze and repeatedly explain, in a clear and entertaining fashion, the question of *aliyah*, and the very great differences between real Jewish *life* in Israel vs. Jewish *existence* in foreign lands.

In his classic work, "*Orot*," Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook writes that our unhealthy attachment to the Diaspora results from not learning the deep understandings of Torah, and from seeing Judaism in its superficial aspects alone. He writes:

“We are not rejecting any form of Judaism, or contemplation, which is founded on truthfulness, on sensitivity of thought, or on the fear of Heaven, in whatever form it takes; but only rejecting the specific aspect of this perspective which seeks to negate the secrets of Torah and their great influence on the spirit of the nation -- for this is a tragedy which we are obligated to fight against with counsel and wisdom, with holiness and with valor” (Orot, 1:2).

In a similar light, this book is not coming to reject, or condemn, any practice of Judaism which is based on a sincere fear of Heaven, nor to reject or condemn any Jew, or Jewish community, G-d forbid. The essays in this book come to reject only the understanding of Judaism which negates the centrality of the Land of Israel to Jewish life. In the words of Rabbi Kook, “...this is a tragedy which we are obligated to fight against with counsel and wisdom, with holiness and with valor.”

I would like to thank the people at Arutz 7 and Israel National News.com for having afforded me an outlet to disseminate the teachings of “*Torat Eretz Yisrael*,” which I have gleaned from my nearly thirty years in Israel. I would also like to thank all of the Rabbis who taught me along the way, and who helped me to discover the priceless jewels of Rabbi Kook’s writings, and to understand the enormous, all-encompassing depth of his teachings. Thanks are also due to the readers of my blog, both my fans and my detractors, who forced me to capsulize these vital understandings and digitalize them to all of my brothers and sisters, both those in Israel and those who are still surfing in the four corners of Diaspora Cyberspace. A heartfelt “*yasher koach*” goes to Rabbi Moshe Kaplan and Shahar Parente for getting the book

ready for press. Shahar asks that all readers who are inspired by this book please recommend it to fellow Jews, both in Israel and abroad, that they join in the *mitzvah* of getting the message across. Finally, inexpressible thanks to G-d for opening my eyes, for bringing me to the Holy Land, and for granting me, and my family, the greatest blessing of all – life in the Promised Land of our forefathers. May it be His will, that He gather all of our scattered exiles, and bring them all speedily home to our Land, the Land of Israel, with the rebuilding of our Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Amen.

Tzvi Fishman

Yerushalayim

EXTRA! EXTRA! Read All About It!

What can you do? Some people simply love to disagree. It doesn't matter what I write, they'll insist the opposite. If I say the sky is blue, they'll reply that it isn't really blue – it's a spectrum of colors that looks blue due to atmospheric conditions. If I say that a person needs water to live, they'll say that research proves that a person can survive on carrot juice and goat's milk. If I write that Jewish babies can't result from homosexual couples, they'll answer that babies can be bought in Thailand and converted to Judaism. If I say that G-d wants us to live in Israel, they'll protest that if G-d wanted us to live in Israel, He wouldn't have sent us into exile.

Other people are confused about things simply because they haven't learned. Or because the things they learned were filled with misconceptions and holes. This is especially true when it comes to Torah. When the Jewish People were exiled from the Land of Israel, the Torah was shrunken into “four cubits of halachah” (Berachot 8A). Without a land and country of our own, the national framework of Torah was shattered, and we were only left with a handful of ritual commandments, like *kashrut*, *tefillin*, *shofar*, *tzitzit*, and *Shabbat*, sort of like the leftover bones of a big pink Pacific smoked salmon after Sabbath morning kiddush.

Our Sages instructed us to continue to perform these precepts in the Diaspora, even though the commandments were given to be performed in Israel, as the Ramban (Vayikra, 18:25) and “*The Kuzari*” (5:23) make clear. This decree was enacted so the commandments wouldn’t be forgotten and seem new when we returned to the Land of Israel, as Rashi and other sources explain (Rashi, Devarim, 11:17-17; Sifre).

Thus, in the exile, the focus of Torah studies was placed on the day-to-day *mitzvot* that still applied in our wandering status, and on the private worship of the individual Jew, rather than on the all-encompassing Torah of *Eretz Yisrael* which focuses on the NATION, in all of its aspects of Jewish statehood, and on the service of G-d by the “*Clal*,” by the nation as a whole, through which the Name of G-d is sanctified in the world.

Giving this miniaturized focus of Torah learning, and the prolonged exile from our Land, it wasn’t long before the NATIONAL ESSENCE of the Torah was forgotten.

This situation was exacerbated by the pernicious influence of the foreign cultures where we lived, most specifically by Christianity, whose doctrines slowly crept into our psyches and altered our understandings of Torah. For instance, exiled amongst nations who believed in a separation between religion and state, we too began to view Judaism as merely the performance and celebration of religious precepts and holidays. True, we had more commandments than the gentiles, but other than that, we looked upon Judaism as a religion like any other, the mere practice of religious customs and laws. Matters of government, military security, agriculture, economy, a justice system,

and the like, were taken care of by others, as if none of these things had anything to do with Judaism at all.

As generations passed and we became accustomed to this sad and shrunken state of affairs, little by little, our longing for our own Jewish kingdom and nationhood in our own Jewish Land - the essence and goal of the Torah - became a faraway dream, or a jingle about *Mashiach*, or, all too often, a seemingly irrelevant matter that had no practical bearing on our lives (see Orot, 1:1, by Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook).

Nonetheless, the Torah is not just a list of religious deeds and holidays for the individual Jew, as many people still believe, clinging out of habit, and out of a lack of learning, to this myopic and mistaken view, which stems from the length and darkness of the exile and the influence of foreign religions and creeds.

For instance, take a look at this week's Torah portion of *Shoftim* (Devarim, 16:18). It begins talking about the role of "*shoftim and shotrim*," Jewish judges and policemen. Rashi explains that the role of Jewish policemen is to make sure the commandments are kept by the populace. There may be a Jewish cop or two in New York, but he can't give you a fine, or drag you to jail, for selling bread on Passover. Obviously, we need our own Jewish homeland and society to keep this aspect of Torah. And while the policemen and judges in Israel today don't yet fulfill this function in all of its Torah aspects (and very often act in defiance of the Torah as many of you are fond of noting), this is a passing phase in the evolving process of shedding the mentality and cobwebs of galut, and gradually returning to our true Torah

lifestyle, little by little, so that all segments of the nation can participate in the national enterprise of Redemption, the religious and non-religious alike, everyone pitching in together, as part of G-d's great game plan in restoring the Jewish People to Zion.

Similarly, regarding the prohibition of idol worship, which follows in this week's Torah portion, if a Jew in America wants to go to church and bow down to a wooden statue, there is no one to stop him. To enact this guideline of Torah, you need your own Jewish national Land, with your own Jewish policemen and legal enforcement system. This should be obvious to everyone.

The Torah portion continues with the injunction that legal questions must be decided by the Jewish Supreme Court in Jerusalem. Even the people who are obsessed with disagreeing with everything I write will have a hard time explaining that Jerusalem can just as well be in Texas or California, and that the Torah's use of the expression, "*the place that I have chosen*" means not necessarily Jerusalem, but any place that there is a thriving Jewish community, even in Melbourne or Cape Town.

Next, the Torah portion speaks about the Jewish king. Imagine a Jewish king in Paris, London, or the White House! Especially when the Jewish king is called upon to enforce Torah law over the kingdom where he rules. Obviously, this part of the Torah can only come to fruition in the Land of the Jews. Also, please note that the affairs of the king refer specifically to the Jewish NATION in the NATIONAL framework of the Torah. It isn't a private *mitzvah* for every Jew to declare himself king. Imagine what chaos that would lead to:

"I'm the king!"

“No, I’m the king!”

“What do you mean? Both of you are imposters – my son is the king!”

“What’s the big deal? My son’s a doctor!”

Obviously, the Torah is telling us that Judaism is much more than a list of ritual precepts – Judaism is the NATIONAL CONSTITUTION of the Jewish NATION. And that can only come about in the Land of Israel.

Then, this week’s Torah portion goes on to discuss the allotments awarded to the *Kohanim* and *Leviim*. Once again, all of the matters concerning priestly dues and tithes only apply in the Land of Israel.

Then comes the rules that apply to prophets. While there may be many would-be prophets wandering around the streets of Manhattan, prophecy is one of the unique specialties of the Jewish People, restricted to the Land of Israel, or concerning the Land of Israel, as in the example of the prophecy of Ezekiel in the land of Kasdim, which continued because it started in *Eretz Yisrael* and concerned the return of the Jews to Israel (Kuzari, 2:14).

Next in the Torah portion comes the designation of “cities of refuge,” where accidental murderers can flee. Once again, the Torah is not talking about Miami Beach, Las Vegas, or Chicago, even in the heydays of Meir Lansky and Bugsy Siegel.

And then we come to commandments about the Israel Defense Force and war. With all due credit to the JDL, how long do you think a Jewish army, or even commando unit, would last in Russia, or Germany, or the good ol’ USA? Obviously, to have a Jewish army you need your own

Jewish country. I think even the biggest adversaries of *aliyah* can understand that.

All of these things are vital parts of Judaism and the Jewish People: policemen, judges, Jerusalem, Jewish kings, priestly tithes, cities of refuge, prophecy, armies, and wars.

Finally, the Torah portion ends with the *mitzvah* of the “*eglah arufah*,” in the case where a murdered body is discovered on the outskirts of the city. Once again, if you live in Brooklyn or Monsey, this doesn’t apply to you, so you can continue to relax.

It turns out that the Torah portion is completely concerned with Torah life in the Land of Israel. The commandments we can perform in the exile is an “itsy-bitsy, teeny-weeny” version of Torah when compared to the all-encompassing NATIONAL TORAH of *Eretz Yisrael*.

G-d has commanded all of his People, the Children of Israel, to establish this national Torah constitution and perform its laws in the one and only place on Earth where this is possible – in *Eretz Yisrael*. This is a national *mitzvah*, incumbent on the Nation, the establishment of the Nation of Israel, according to our Torah constitution, in Israel. Right now, it is called *Medinat Yisrael*. If, in the future, it is called something else, like “*Medinat Moshe*,” or “*Medinat David*,” or “*Medinat Yehuda*,” who cares? Right now, G-d, in His infinite kindness, has given us *Medinat Yisrael*, the State of Israel, and it is up to us to build it, and to do our share in steering it more and more toward the path of the Torah to which we all aspire. And to do that, we have to be here.

Ask Any 8-Year Old

Give this week's Torah portion, "*Lech Lecha*," to an eight-year old to read, and ask him where G-d wants the Jewish People to live, and he will immediately answer "the Land of Israel." Give it to a gentile to read and ask him the same question. "The Land of Israel" he will answer without batting an eye. Give it to a Diasporian and ask him the same question, and you'll get a dozen different answers:

"Well, it depends...."

"It's not the same for us today...."

"What was true for Abraham isn't a general rule...."

"In Brooklyn, New York...."

"In Australia...."

"Until the *Moshiach* comes, he can live anywhere he wants...."

But the fact is that G-d starts off His relationship with the Jewish People by telling our first forefather, Avraham, "*Get thee forth to the Land that I will show you.*" G-d doesn't tell him to keep *Shabbat*. He doesn't tell Avraham to keep kosher. He tells him to live in Israel. This is where a Jew belongs. This is the only place where a Jew can truly serve G-d. The Holy People are to live in the Holy Land. This is G-d's plan for the world and for His holy chosen Nation. This is the very first lesson that G-d teaches us. "*Get thee forth to the Land.*" Ask any eight-year old. Living in the Land of Israel is the foundation of the Jewish Nation. #1 on the list.

To live in the Land of Israel, we need to keep the Torah, yes. But the first, basic understanding that G-d wants us to know is that just as every nation needs a land, the special holy Nation of Israel needs a special Holy Land. The Land of Israel is a part of our national identity. It is a part of our spiritual essence. It is not something extra to Judaism. It is not some bonus *mitzvah*, or a nice place to spend a vacation. Israel is a part of who we are. We cannot be the Nation of Israel without the Land of Israel. We can be scattered individuals, in scattered Jewish communities around the world. We can be advisors to presidents, and assimilated novelists and famous pop singers, married to wonderful non-Jewish mates, but we can't be a NATION with OUR OWN LAND unless we return to the Land of our forefathers, the Land which G-d gave to the Jews.

This is the very first lesson of the Torah: *"Get thee forth to the Land."* It's a part of our genetic makeup as the children of Avraham. Just as Avraham left his birthplace to start a new life in Israel, we can, too. It's in our blood. It is a part of our psychohistorical heritage. Yes, it's scary. Yes, it is difficult. But as the children of Avraham *Avinu*, we have what it takes.

Chocolate Chip Cookies

Believe it or not, chocolate chip cookies were one of the things that made me realize that a Jew's true place is in Israel. When I started to learn about Judaism in Hollywood, someone told me that a Jew has to say a blessing before and after eating, in order to thank G-d for the sustenance He gives us. For instance, after eating a chocolate chip cookie, one says the following:

“Blessed art Thou, L-rd our G-d, King of the universe, for all of the nourishment and the produce of the field, and for the lovely and spacious Land which You granted to our fathers as a heritage, to eat of its fruit and enjoy its good gifts....”

My friend explained to me that the Land which G-d had given to our forefathers was the Land of Israel.

That's strange, I thought. I mean, since I was in America, wouldn't it be more appropriate to thank G-d for California, or for the wheat fields of Kansas? But that's not what the blessing said. A Jew was to thank G-d for *Eretz Yisrael*. The blessing said we were “to eat of its fruits and enjoy its good gifts.” That was funny, I thought.

The blessing after eating cookies continues:

“Have mercy, L-rd our G-d, on Israel Your nation, on Jerusalem Your city, on Zion the abode of Your majesty, on Your altar and on Your Temple.”

Hmm, I thought. That's interesting, too. Why didn't it say, “Have mercy on America Your nation, on Los Angeles Your city, on Hollywood the abode of Your majesty, on MGM Studios and on Disneyland?”

But that's not all. The blessing after eating cookies continues:

“Rebuild the holy city of Jerusalem speedily in our days. Bring us there and gladden us with the restoration of our Land; may we eat of its fruit and enjoy its good gifts; may we bless You for it in holiness and purity.”

Wow! That was really a mindblower. I mean, be honest. Look what the blessing says. After eating some chocolate chip cookies in LA, or a slice of pizza in Toronto, or one of those big salty pretzels off a push cart in New York, we ask G-d to rebuild Jerusalem and to bring us to the Land of Israel! We ask G-d to make us happy “with the restoration of our Land.”

Wow, I thought. America isn't my land. My Land is the LAND OF ISRAEL!

As far as I knew, no one had put any hashish into the chocolate chip cookie, but it blew my mind all the same!

A Jew was supposed to eat the fruits of the Land of Israel and enjoy its good gifts – not the gifts of America, Australia, Canada, or France! And even if we were to eat a piece of cake in America, we were still to thank G-d for the Land of Israel, all the same! Mind-blowing!

And if the message wasn't clear, the end of the blessing repeated it again, “Blessed are You, O L-rd, for the Land of Israel and for the food.”

All that I learned from a chocolate chip cookie!

Jungle Story

The last few Sabbaths, the Birthright/Mayanot Program has been sending guys over to our house for the morning meal, as part of their free, ten-day tour of Israel. It's a very worthwhile program, designed to give young American Jews an emergency transfusion of Jewish pride, so they won't end up marrying Cindy, Christine, or Brigitte when they return to the States. Yesterday, after waiting a half hour, when they failed to show up, we started to eat. I was describing to my children what happens if a child turns away from the Torah, G-d forbid, after his family has guarded it for thousands of years. Since it is a man's mission in life to pass the Torah down to his children, if a child abandons the teaching of his father and marries out of the faith, then in a very real sense, the father has failed in his mission. Since the father has failed, then the grandfather has failed, and the great grandfather before him. I gave an example of dominoes, whereby one falls and knocks down all the others. The family chain is cut off. The line of generations is broken. Thousands of years of love and allegiance to Torah are lost. To drive the point home, I let out a scream, the scream of generations, the scream of grandfathers and great grandfathers and great great grandfathers, all the way back to Yaacov and Yitzhak and Avraham. I screamed at the top of my lungs, for almost a minute.

Just at that moment, the three young Birthright visitors arrived at my doorstep. Startled by the scream, they were afraid to knock. When the terrifying scream continued and continued, they were about to bolt. Just then, the son of a neighbor came by and knocked on the door. When I opened it, I found the three Birthrighters standing outside, tongue-tied. With a warm handshake and bear hug, I herded them in.

After guiding them through *Kiddush* and *HaMotzei*, and filling up their plates with mountains of home-cooked food, I explained to them why I had screamed. Repeating the story, I screamed again, just as loud and long as before, to get the point across to them what their estrangement from the Torah was doing to their grandfathers and grandmothers in Heaven.

Then I told them about the Jungle Story, about the shipwrecked boy who is raised by apes and grows up thinking he is an ape, too. That's what happens to Jews like them who grow up in America without any Jewish education – they think they're Americans and forget that they're Jews. It could be that their parents told them they were Jews, and they'll say that they're Jews, but they don't know what being Jewish is all about. That's why the Birthright organization sends them to Israel – to give them an adrenaline shot of Jewishness in the hope that they won't marry out of the faith. But their guides don't talk much about the Torah during the trip, so I have two hours with them on *Shabbat* to jam four thousand years of Jewish history and Torah down their throats, along with my wife's potatoes and chicken. (They knocked off a bottle of wine while I was at it.)

Then, so they don't think I'm some crazy old man with a beard, I show them my cheesecake glossies from Hollywood when I tried to look as gentile and American as Paul Newman, to let them know I was there once upon a time where they are today, in nowhere's land. Then I explain that my kids are growing up speaking Hebrew in Israel because in addition to touring the country, I deleted all of the Star Spangled Banner cassettes in my brain by sitting in a Jerusalem yeshiva and exchanging my hard-drive of American lies with the hundreds of holy

Jewish books on the shelves of our living room library, especially the shelf with the volumes of books written by Rabbi Kook who explains how the tiny Torah of the exile has been transformed into the colossal Torah of *Eretz Yisrael* in our time with the reestablishment of the NATION OF ISRAEL in the LAND OF OUR FOREFATHERS.

Surprisingly, at the end of the meal, the Birthrighters always thank me and tell me what a great time they had learning how they've been duped all their lives. I know that Americans are polite and they're trained to say things like that, but these guys really mean it. Why? Because, finally, someone told them the truth. Most of them seem to truly appreciate my efforts. There are always the die-hard, brainwashed Americans who are totally shocked and appalled by my non-stop bombardment, which makes Israeli air strikes on Gaza look like the cheap Chinese fireworks that they really are.

The sad truth is that these poor jungle boys don't know anything, and even after four years in the best American colleges, studying all kinds of books, they have never seen a *Chumash* or *Gemara* in their lives. Most of them can't read Hebrew, and they know nothing about the Israeli-Arab conflict, since it literally plays absolutely no part in their lives. But once you get them to realize that they've been misled by their parents, and force-fed non-kosher American sausages and bacon all of their lives, once they realize they are as American as the Chinaman who runs the corner fruit stand, once they realize that they don't know who they really are at all, at least then you have something to work with. Once you blow away the house of cards of their phony American identity and make them realize that George Washington isn't their forefather, and introduce them to Avraham *Avinu* and the rest of our glorious tribe,

then you can teach them what real Judaism is. But for someone who thinks he already knows, and believes that Judaism is a religion like Christianity and Buddhism with its private, ritual service of G-d, and who rejects coming to Israel because it would mess up his game plan, well you can talk to him until you're blue in the face and write hundreds of blogs, but his head is so polluted with his American ideas and aspirations, he'll never catch on that Judaism isn't just another religion but a NATIONAL CONSTITUTION for a HOLY NATION that has its own HOLY LAND.

Our Birthright isn't visiting the Land of Israel. It's living here. It isn't reading Israel National News. It's making Israel National News by being here.

I hope you understand the difference.

Who Says *Aliyah* is a *Mitzvah*?

People occasionally ask, where is it written in the Torah that we have to build a State? Apparently, they are not familiar with the words of the giant Torah authority, the Ramban, who repeatedly stated that we are commanded that the Land of Israel be in our hands, and not in the hands of any other nation:

“We were commanded to inherit this Land which the L-rd, Blessed Be He, gave to our Forefathers, to Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaacov, and not to abandon it to the hands of other nations, or abandon it to desolation. *Hashem* said to them, ‘*To inherit the Land and dwell there, for to you I have given the Land to possess, and you shall inherit the Land that I swore to your Forefathers*’ – **behold, we are commanded with its conquest in every generation** (Ramban, Supplement to Sefer HaMitzvot of the Rambam, Positive Commandment 4).

The Ramban continues:

“This is what our Sages call ‘*Milchemet Mitzvah*,’ an obligatory war. This Land is not to be left in the hands of the Seven Nations, or in the hands of any other nation, in any generation whatsoever...this is a positive commandment **which applies at every time**” (Ramban, *ibid*).

The Ramban concludes:

“And the proof that this is a Torah commandment is this – they were told in the matter of the Spies, ‘*Go up and conquer the Land as Hashem has said to you. Don’t fear, and don’t be discouraged.*’ And further it says, ‘*And when the L-rd sent you from Kadesh Barnea saying, Go up and possess the Land which I gave you, and you rebelled against the L-*

rd your G-d, and you did not believe in Me, and did not listen to this command” (Ibid).

All of the early and later Torah authorities, the *Rishonim* and *Achronim*, decide the law in this fashion on the basis of the Ramban that the precept of conquering the Land applies in all generations, and all of them agree that it is a commandment of the Torah (Shuchan Oruch, Pitchei *T’shuva* , Even HaEzer, 75:6).

Sovereignty over a country means having an army, a government, a justice system, an economic system, etc. By commanding us to rule over the Land of Israel, the Torah commands us to establish a State. Rabbi Kook emphasized that whether sovereignty is brought about by a prime minister, a prophet, a judge, or a king, it is valid Jewish sovereignty when it comes on behalf of *Clal Yisrael*, the encompassing congregation of Israel. (Mishpat Kohen, 337).

Thus, the State of Israel is a commandment of the Torah. Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook emphasized that, “The intrinsic value of the State is not dependent on the number of observant Jews here. Of course, our aspiration is that all of our people will embrace the Torah and the *mitzvot*. Nonetheless, the Statehood of Israel is holy, whatever religious level it contains.”

“There are religious Jews who express a type of criticism and say, ‘If the State of Israel were run according to our lifestyle and spirit, then we would accept it. Until then, we abstain from it.’ They talk as if the State does not belong to them. But the truth is that the State belongs to all of us.”

Rabbi Kook asserted that anyone who refuses to recognize the State of Israel does not recognize *Hashem's* rule over what takes place in the world. If the Master of the Universe decided to bring the Jewish People back to the Land of Israel via the vehicle of the State of Israel, who are we to complain or disagree?

Rabbi Kook said that we had to be patient, that Redemption came slowly in gradual stages, little by little (Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot 1:1), and that it would reach perfection with time.

“In the Talmud, our Sages explain that all of the material used in building the Temple became sanctified only after it was set into place. We build with the profane and sanctify afterward (Meilah 14A and B, see Rashi there). This was enacted because our Sages realized that during the construction, workers would sit in the shade of the building to rest from the sun, and thus improperly derive personal benefit from something which had been exclusively dedicated for the use of the Temple. The *Beit HaMikdash* was built in this fashion, and this is the way the Redemption of Israel develops, in stages, little by little. Just as the stones used in building the Temple were not sanctified at first, so, too, the building of *Eretz Yisrael* is accomplished by every segment of the Nation, by the righteous and by the less righteous. We build with the secular, even though this causes complications and problems, and little by little all of the various problems will vanish, and the sanctification of *Hashem* will appear in more and more light.”

As we say in Israel, “*Savlenut.*” Patience, my friends. Patience.

Taking Care of Mom

I spent most of the day today with my Mom at her nursing home. The Filipino woman who takes care of her went on a month long vacation to Manila, so I'm pitching in with the staff to make sure that Mom gets the best care possible. I'm not sure that she recognizes me anymore, but she probably senses that it's me on some soul level, and maybe she still recognizes my voice.

A little over a decade ago, I received a phone call from my Aunt Peachy in Florida, saying that something was the matter with my Mother and that I should come to Florida as quickly as I could. When I arrived there a few days later, it turned out that Mom was suffering from the early stages of Alzheimer's, and my Dad, who had an assortment of medical problems of his own, couldn't handle her by himself. So after conferring with their doctors, I bought four jumbo suitcases, filled them with their clothing, and took my parents back with me to Israel, telling my Mother that they were coming to my son's *bar mitzvah*. My uncle in Boca put their house up for sale, and before they knew what was happening, they were living with us in Shilo, new pioneer settlers in the wild "West Bank."

Because of their medical needs, including frequent follow-up visits with an internist, cardiologist, neurologist, urologist, endocrinologist, psychiatrist, orthopedist, dermatologist, dentist, and optometrist, Shilo proved to be too far away from the city. So, we moved to Jerusalem where I was fortunate to locate a building that had two apartments available, one for my family and one for my parents.

I wrote a novel about the experience that I hope to post soon on Amazon, but to make a long story short, thanks to my angelic wife who put up with a husband who spent more time in the downstairs apartment than with her, I did my best to make their transition to Israel as fun, loving, and interesting as possible. In addition to schlepping them to doctors, I took them out for a drive every day, shopping, eating out, spending time with their grandchildren, running to keep up with my Mother whenever she would bolt from the house during one of her Alzheimer outbursts, until I set Mom up with a Filipino helper, and found a tremendous young companion for my Dad who learned Torah with him and took them out during the day to keep them active. I enrolled them in the Melabev senior citizens club for English-speakers, where they met new friends and learned all about Israel, the Jewish holidays, current events, and other stimulating activities several times a week.

Ten years later, many of the blogs I wrote, and the articles I translated for jewishsexuality.com were written in the hospitals where my Dad spent almost two years battling a cancer. He passed away at the age of 89 and was buried on the Mount of Olives, one of the holiest places in the world, a far cry from being laid to rest in a cemetery alongside some Boca Raton golf course.

After he passed away, we moved Mom into a nursing home with her Filipino worker, where she could get round-the-clock care. So, for the next few weeks, I'll be cutting down on blog writing to spend more time with my Mother.

The moral of the story is that it is possible to move to Israel and take your parents with you. If they don't want to come now, chances are they'll change their minds later when they need more help and want to be near their grandchildren. Life for senior citizens in Israel offers great stimulation, unmatched blessing, and top medical and nursing care. So if you really want to do the best thing you can for your parents, move to Israel and bring them with you, either now or later. There's no greater blessing in the world.

And no greater reward, as it promises in the Ten Commandments:
"Honor your father and mother, that your days be long in the Land which the L-rd your G-d gives you" (Shemot, 20:12).

And it sure ain't talking about Boca!

More Beautiful Than Everest

The last two days, I was away from home on a short vacation with my wife to the lovely seaside city of Netanya. As we were driving there, she mentioned that someone in her family was going for a vacation this summer to Austria.

“Austria?” I blurted, nearly losing control of the wheel. “Why would any Jew want to go to Austria?”

“For the mountains and the scenery,” she answered.

At that very moment, we reached the intersection just before Tel Aviv that leads north toward Haifa. Coming out of the turn, the first thing you see is the mountain of garbage that has long been a landmark on the outskirts of Tel Aviv.

Every time, I see it, its beauty and majesty overwhelms me. To me it is one of the most beautiful mountains in the world, just behind Mount Moriah, Mount Herman, and Mount Tabor. The sight of it is literally breathtaking.

“Why go to Austria when we have magnificent and holy mountains here?” I asked my wife. “Just look! Can anything be more beautiful than a mountain of Jewish garbage in the Holy Land? It has to be one of the natural wonders of the world. Let’s stop and take some pictures!”

“We are on vacation,” she said.

“I know,” I answered. “What a wonderful place to start!”

I’m being serious. In my eyes, the mountain of garbage overlooking Tel Aviv is more wondrous than Everest. After two thousand years of exile

in foreign lands, not only has the Almighty given us back our cherished Homeland, He has given us such an overabundance of blessing that we have an abundance of refuse, too! A whole mountain of excess trash. If Moses were here to see it, he would crawl up to its summit on his hands and his knees, kissing every piece of litter on the way!

That evening, as my wife and I sat on our hotel terrace watching a glowing Mediterranean sunset, I was so moved by the memory of the garbage mountain that I picked up my notebook and scribbled a poem.

ODE TO THE MOUNTAIN I LOVE

O holy garbage mountain, I love you so greatly.

In my wonderstruck eyes, you look so noble and stately.

Even though you aren't the tallest on earth,

You fill my heart with rapturous mirth.

Everest, Rushmore, and the Alps are sublime,

But for all of their grandeur, they're simply not mine.

Even though you are only a mountain of refuse,

Compared to you, the rest are all hevel.

Though your slopes are made of refuse that people don't want to eat,

Each time I pass by you, your aroma smells sweet.

For you are a holy mountain of garbage in Israel and that makes you blessed,

Placing you head and shoulders over all of the rest.

PS – anyone interested in purchasing a poster size blow-up of the Holy Garbage Mountain, can order through this website. We will also be happy to arrange to send shipments of its trash overseas via Zim Lines. Price is \$80,000 per ton. Don't miss out on the opportunity! It's the perfect addition to your front lawn, Diaspora garden, or golf course.

Uman Uman Uman

It's that time of year again when everyone seems to be rushing to buy plane tickets to celebrate *Rosh HaShanah* at *Rebbe* Nachman's gravesite in Uman.

To tell you the truth, it isn't for me. Not that I'm against it. If people want to leave *Eretz Yisrael* to spend *Rosh HaShanah* in Russia alongside their *Rebbe*, that's their business. Live and let live, I say. They are all sincere people, seeking to get closer to G-d. More power to them. But for me, after taking so long to reach *Eretz Yisrael*, I just can't seem to drag myself away from the Holy Land for *Rosh HaShanah*.

Before my parents came on *aliyah*, I would go down to America to visit them every few years. But after they started living in Israel, I no longer had a reason, or any desire, to leave the Holy Land.

Concerning *Rebbe* Nachman of Breslov himself, I love his teachings. When I started out on my path to *t'shuva*, his writings were a great inspiration to me. They are even now. My copy of "*Likutei Etzot*," (known as "Advice" in English), is filled through and through with my fervent, born-again, underlinings. No one is better than *Rebbe* Nachman at cutting through all the smokescreens and illusions of the material world and leading a seeker directly to G-d. But I'm the type of person who has an eclectic nature, and I believe in taking the best from everyone, so in addition to all of *Rebbe* Nachman's writings, my library is also filled with the books of other masters of Torah thought and learning. As they say, there are 70 faces to the Torah.

According to Jewish law, it is forbidden in all generations to leave *Eretz Yisrael*, except to learn Torah, marry, rescue Jews or Jewish property

from the gentiles, or do business, and then **one must return to Israel**, for dwelling outside the Land is forbidden (Mishna Torah, Rambam, Laws of Kings and Their Wars, Ch9). It is also permissible to temporarily visit family in the Diaspora, or to attend to some other *mitzvah*. It is also permitted to leave Israel to visit the gravesites of holy *Tzaddikim* as part of one's religious devotions. Seeking medical treatment in the Diaspora is, of course, also allowed, and there are *halachic* authorities who allow visits outside the Land for reasons of mental health, where a change of scenery and rest is needed. But a mere fun excursion to the Diaspora is forbidden, as the verse of *Tehillim* implies, "*How can I sing the L-rd's song in a foreign land?*" (Tehillim, 126)

So, anyway, I'll be celebrating *Rosh HaShanah* once again this year in Jerusalem, thank G-d. *Rebbe* Nachman himself was full of praise and yearning for *Eretz Yisrael*. He writes that a Jew's service of G-d can only be complete in the Land of Israel, and that everywhere he went, he was on the way to *Eretz Yisrael*. In fact, his teachings about *Rosh HaShanah* explain that the essence of the holiday is completely dependent upon the special treasures of the Holy Land. This is because on *Rosh HaShanah*, we declare G-d's Kingship (*Malchut*) over our lives, and over the world, and *Eretz Yisrael* embodies the concept of *Malchut*, where G-d's Kingship is most gloriously manifested. Nothing more fervently expresses the acceptance of G-d's Kingship over oneself than living in *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land where G-d's eyes rest upon from the beginning of the year (*Rosh HaShanah*) to the end.

Here are just a few samples of *Rebbe* Nachman's teachings:

“The principle element of a Jew’s holiness is that he merit to rise higher and higher in the service of G-d, and this comes from the holiness of *Eretz Yisrael*. And the principle victory in the battle that must be fought and won in this world is to come to *Eretz Yisrael*. And all this is the essence of our Divine worship from *Rosh HaShanah* unto *Shmini Atzeret*, everything is to reveal the holiness of *Eretz Yisrael*, in order that we might merit to come speedily to *Eretz Yisrael*. And this is the essence of the establishment of *Malchut* that we are engaged in at this time, as explained in the writings of the Arizal, because the principle building of *Malchut* is to reveal the Kingship of G-d to everyone in the world, which we fervently pray for during these days, and the principle revelation of G-d’s Kingship is in the Land of Israel. Thus, the essence of Israel’s holiness is revealed on *Rosh HaShanah*, as it is written in the Torah, ‘*The eyes of the L-rd your G-d are constantly upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end.*’”

“The entire essence of the blessings of *Malchiot*, *Zichronot*, and *Shofarot* on *Rosh HaShanah*, everything is to reveal the holiness of *Eretz Yisrael*. For this is the central place of the ingathering of the exiles, through the blast of the *shofar*, as it says, ‘*On this day, a shofar will be blown.*’ For all of our Divine service on *Rosh HaShanah* is to reveal the holiness of *Eretz Yisrael* and to merit to return speedily to our Land.”

Come *Rosh HaShanah*, the followers of *Rebbe Nachman* may be in Uman at his gravesite, but *Rebbe Nachman* himself is here in *Eretz Yisrael*.

“Next Year in Jerusalem”

“Next year in Jerusalem” is the proclamation that concludes our *Yom Kippur* prayers. Year after year, the cry echoes out in synagogues from Brooklyn to Toronto to Paris to Manchester to Moscow, Melbourne, and Mexico City. This is because the repentance of the Jewish People can only be complete when we return to Jerusalem.

Please note the wording that our Sages prescribed for us. We don’t say “Next year in Jerusalem if the government is to my liking.” We don’t say “Next year in Jerusalem if I don’t have to serve in the army.” We don’t say “Next year in Jerusalem if the *Mashiach* comes and brings me there.” We say “Next year in Jerusalem” period, without any pre-conditions.

The longing of every Jew should be to pack up his belongings and come to Jerusalem. Returning to Jerusalem is what Judaism is all about. According to the Torah and the Prophets of Israel, the Jewish People are to return to Jerusalem. Nothing could be clearer. We do this by saying good-bye to foreign lands and coming home to *Eretz Yisrael*.

Today, thank G-d, after 2000 years of exile, we have a Jewish airline to take us home. Today, thank G-d, most Jews have the money to buy a ticket. Today, thank G-d, there are agencies like “Nefesh B’Nefesh” that help with plane fare, housing, job placement, learning Hebrew, tax breaks, and other benefits. Today, thank G-d, there are beautiful apartments and villas in the Land of Israel. There are synagogues on almost every street. There is more Torah learning, *yeshivot*, *heders*, *ulpanot* for religious schools, and Torah giants in Israel than anywhere else in the world. Today, thank G-d, Jerusalem is a modern,

magnificent, rebuilt city. And the State of Israel is one of the superpowers of the world.

There's no reason to wait for *Mashiach's* arrival. G-d has made our return to Israel possible for everyone who wants to come. Already, G-d has returned millions of Jews to Israel without *Mashiach's* coming. Of course, we all hope and pray that *Mashiach* will come any moment, but his coming is like icing on the cake. By gathering the exiles, rebuilding Jerusalem, and smashing our enemies, again and again, G-d has already done much of his work.

My friends - this is a clear, discernible reality. It is obvious for anyone who wants to open his eyes and see it. For millions, "Next Year in Jerusalem" has already come true.

It's like the old joke about the guy who climbs onto the roof of his house to escape the waters of the flood, and cries out for G-d to save him. When a boat comes along to rescue, he refuses, saying that he is waiting for G-d to save him. When a helicopter hovers overhead and lowers a rescue basket, he refuses to climb in, saying he is waiting for G-d to save him. After he drowns and is brought up to Heaven for Judgment, he complains that G-d didn't save him. "Who do you think sent the rescue boat and the helicopter?" G-d asks.

G-d has rebuilt the Land of Israel in a miraculous fashion. G-d has built modern cities, flourishing suburbs, highways, industry, technology, agriculture, tennis courts, swimming pools, movie theaters, world-leading hospitals, and everything else that a person could want. G-d has given us the ability to buy plane tickets, and He has set up all kinds of organizations to help a family come on *aliyah*. All He wants us to do is

step on the plane. Not by waiting for *Mashiach* to fly down from Heaven in a winged chariot and wave a magic wand that will whisk us to Israel with a fairytale poof! G-d wants us to act, on our own, in order to make the proclamation “Next Year in Jerusalem” real.

G-d has made it as easy as He can. Now it is up to us.

May the Almighty inscribe all of His People in the Book of Life, and may the cry, “Next Year in Jerusalem,” fill all of our hearts with true heartfelt longing to return home to the place we all belong.

An *Etrog* Tree Doesn't Grow in Brooklyn

If it did it would die. Just the way the Diaspora is destined to die. The *etrog* tree doesn't belong in Brooklyn. The climate isn't right for it. It's the same with the *lulav*, *hadasim*, and *aravot*. The four species we use in performing the *mitzvah* of waving the *lulav* on *Sukkot* are indigenous to *Eretz Yisrael*, just as the Torah is indigenous to *Eretz Yisrael*, and the Jewish People are indigenous to *Eretz Yisrael*. We belong in *Eretz Yisrael*. All of the holidays are intrinsically connected to *Eretz Yisrael*. The Torah was designed and fashioned by the Almighty to be observed in *Eretz Yisrael*.

How wonderful to be in the Land of Israel where you hear hammers pounding away the week before the holiday and see *sukkah* booths wherever you look!

I remember living in New York City and walking the length and width of the city on the holiday of *Sukkot* and not seeing even one *sukkah* on the street. Finally I found a mini *sukkah*, the size of a telephone booth, in the back alley of a kosher dairy restaurant, adjacent to the bathroom.

How wonderful to be in the Land of Israel where you don't have to be embarrassed or afraid to sit in your *sukkah* out on the street! Where you won't receive a fine from the city for putting up an illegal structure, and where you don't have to worry about cops tearing it down, or some Jew-hater tossing a Molotov cocktail on top of your *schach*. How wonderful to be in the Land of Israel where apartment buildings are built with terraces designed for the *Sukkot* holiday! Where the *Kotel* and the place of the Temple are a short ride away! Where there are *sukkah* booths outside of every restaurant! Where it's a national

holiday with school vacation, and not some strange mumbo-jumbo practice of the Jews.

How wonderful to be in the Land of Israel where you can be proud to be a Jew!

Hag samaoch!

Trick or Treat?

Tonight, Jewish youth all over the world – except in Israel – will celebrate the pagan holiday of Halloween.

Halloween is also called All Hallows' Eve, because, for the gentiles, it is a hallowed evening, the eve of All Saints' Day, a day which honors all Christian saints. The Encyclopedia Britannica explains that in ancient Britain and Ireland, the Festival of Halloween was also a celebration of the end of the fertile period of the Celtic goddess Eiseria. It is said that when Eiseria reaches the end of her fertility cycle, the worlds of the dead and the living intertwine. This supposedly happens on October 31. Masks are worn to show respect for the Goddess Eiseria who, like most Celtic gods, does not wish to be seen by human eyes.

This date was also New Year's Eve in both Celtic and Anglo-Saxon times, and was the occasion for one of the ancient fire festivals when huge bonfires were set on hilltops to frighten away evil spirits. The souls of the dead were supposed to revisit their homes on this day, and the festival acquired sinister significance, with ghosts, witches, hobgoblins, black cats, fairies, and demons of all kinds said to be roaming about. It was the time to placate the supernatural powers controlling the processes of nature. In addition, Halloween was thought to be the most favorable time for divinations concerning marriage, luck, health, and death. It was the only day on which the help of the devil was invoked for such purposes. These pagan observances also influenced the Christian festival of All Hallows' Eve, celebrated on the same date.

Jewish Law states: "A Jew should not follow the customs of the gentiles, nor imitate them in dress, or in their way of trimming their hair, as it says, *'You shall not walk in the customs of the nation which I cast out before you'* (Lev. 20:23), and *'Neither shall you walk in their statutes'*

(Lev. 18:3). These verses all refer to one and the same matter of not imitating them. A Jew, on the contrary, should be distinguished from them and recognizable by the way he dresses, and in his other activities, just as he is distinguished from them in his knowledge and his beliefs, as it is said, *'I have set you apart from the peoples'* (Lev. 20:26)." (See, Rambam, Laws Regarding Idol Worship and the Ordinances of the Gentiles, 11:1).

When it comes to the question whether Jews can take part in gentile holidays, the *halachic* discussion differs between clearly religious holidays like Xmas, which are forbidden, and purely secular holidays like Labor Day, which are permissible. Halloween's religious origins and pagan history place it in the category of gentile holidays that are forbidden to celebrate. Though Halloween in America has been secularized and commercialized to the point where it is now a frivolous time of costumes, candy, and pranks, it is still celebrated in places like Scotland and Ireland as a Celtic festival of the spirits, and in other places as a holiday honoring the Christian saints. Therefore, "Trick or Treating" is a no-no for Jewish children.

The law prohibiting our participation in gentile holidays and customs comes to protect our special Jewish holiness and cultural distinction. If you allow your kids to participate in the pagan rites of a gentile culture, they will grow up with pumpkin heads instead of Jewish heads. On the other hand, if you try to safeguard our distinction as Jews and not let your children go "Trick or Treating" with all the other kids in the neighborhood, they will grow up hating both you and Judaism for turning them into freaks in the eyes of their friends. Either way, as a parent, you lose.

What's the solution? Move to Israel. The only place you will see a pumpkin here is in the supermarket (a small yellow one that looks more like a squash). If you truly love your children and don't want them growing up with pumpkin heads, then the only solution is to bring them to Israel where they will grow up like Jews.

The Secret of Thanksgiving

I will let you in on a secret. I celebrate thanksgiving. That's right. I do it every day. That's how a Jew spends his entire life, thanking G-d for all of His constant goodness and blessings.

When it comes to celebrating the American holiday of Thanksgiving, there are *halachic* opinions that it is OK for a Jew to participate in the festivities and football games since the holiday is not associated today with any religious observances of the gentiles. Ostensibly, Thanksgiving is a time, dating back to the Pilgrims, to thank G-d for providing disgruntled Englishman with a new place to observe their religion. This being the case, it is difficult for me to understand why a Jew would want to participate in this holiday. As my Grandmother used to say, "A curse on Columbus!" After all, if Columbus hadn't discovered America, millions of Jews wouldn't have ended up marrying out of our faith.

Nonetheless, for all of our brothers and sisters who celebrate Thanksgiving, they can at least claim that it has Jewish sources. After all, we are the people who taught mankind about the obligation to thank G-d for all of His infinite kindness. In Hebrew, the word "*Hodo*" means "expressing thanks" or "thanksgiving." This is how we begin our daily prayers, "*Hodo l'Hashem...*" meaning "*Give thanks to the L-rd, call out in His Name, make known His doings amongst the nations.*" In effect, a Jew celebrates thanksgiving every day. Interestingly, "*Hodo*" is also the Hebrew word for "turkey." So, it is no coincidence that people celebrate Thanksgiving by stuffing their mouths with turkey. Just as Xmas celebrates the birth of a Jew, and Easter celebrates his death, Thanksgiving apparently has Jewish origins as well.

In fact, Columbus himself was a closet Jew. He received the money for his expedition from the great Rabbi, the Abarbanel, who was the acting Finance Minister of Spain. Doesn't 1492 ring a bell? It was also the year of the Spanish Inquisition, when all the Jews were expelled from Spain. It turns out that Columbus, who wrote on his epistles, the Hebrew letters, ב"ה, meaning "*Bezrat Hashem*," or "With the help of G-d," was looking for a safe haven for the Jews. Too bad he didn't sail south across the Mediterranean to Israel. That way he would have saved us from 500 years of unnecessary wandering amongst the goyim, along with the wholesale slaughter and psychological trauma that has accompanied us throughout all of our Diaspora stopovers. And it would have spared us the question of whether Jews should celebrate Thanksgiving once a year like the Americans, or be content with our daily thanksgivings to G-d in our prayers.

All things considered, I think my Grandmother was right.

Who Needs Xmas?

There is no question that we have a lot of problems and challenges facing us in Israel, but at this time of the year, I have to take time-out from the headlines to thank *Hashem* for granting me the incomparable blessing of living in His Holy Land, and not in the spiritually polluted lands of the Diaspora, where Christmas is being celebrated in all of its insidious force and make-believe holiness.

Thank G-d that my children have never heard the seductive carols of Christmas time, the Silent Nights and Joy to the Worlds, whose poisonous melodies are so powerful that I still remember their verses until this day.

Thank G-d that my children aren't surrounded by Christmas trees and mangers and Santa Clauses wherever they go. Thank G-d that they don't confuse the Jewish holidays with all the commercial pre-Christmas hype and sales extravaganzas that mark the birth of the Christian world's false messiah.

In Israel, if you didn't get on the bus to Bethlehem, you'd never know it was Christmas. It doesn't exist. Who needs it? Who Cares? Because this is the only Jewish country in the world. This is the Holy Land. In Monsey, or Borough Park, or any other Jewish ghetto throughout the Diaspora, walk fifty yards in any direction, and you'll discover Xmas lights and a manger. Turn on the TV and Christmas is all you see. In schools all over America and England and France, Jewish boys are kissing gentile girls under mistletoes and exchanging stockings filled with prophylactics and cocaine.

Thank G-d I'm in Israel. Thank G-d that my children are growing up amongst Jews. Thank G-d I don't have to get my kids a Christmas tree so they don't feel left out and different from everyone else.

If you think that's a small thing, it's because you've been so Christmastized that you think like a gentile in your *goyisha* land with all of those Christmas jingles and church bells in your brain.

This is my Xmas wish - may Santa's reindeer take a flying poo on everyone's Christmas. Peace on earth and goodwill to men.

That Says It All!

Every child in the Diaspora knows the difference. But when they get older, I suppose they forget.

In the Diaspora, the Hebrew letters on a *dreidel* are *Nun, Gimmel, Hey, Shin*. “A great miracle happened THERE.”

In Israel, the letters on the *dreidels* are *Nun, Gimmel, Hey, Peh*. “A great miracle happened HERE.”

That says it all.

Happy *Hanukah*!

January 1st Isn't New Year's

Rosh Hashanah is the real New Year's. Not just for Jews. For everyone. As it says in the Mishna: "On Rosh Hashanah all the inhabitants of the world pass before Him, like flocks of sheep...." (Rosh Hashanah, 1:2).

What a difference! While Jews spend the day in shul, a day of fervent remembrance of G-d, listening to the blasts of the shofar, and praying for the welfare of everyone in the world, the gentiles spend their make-believe New Year's getting smashed and stoned out of their minds, puking up their guts, and bedding down with anyone within reach, while imbibing whatever chemicals they can to forget the world.

True, there are some who go to church first, but afterwards they spend their make-believe New Year's getting smashed and stoned out of their minds, puking up their guts, and bedding down with anyone within reach, while imbibing whatever chemicals they can to forget the world.

That's one of the reasons we thank G-d every morning for having made us Jews, and for having separated us from those who go astray after vanity and emptiness, and for having given us the Torah of truth.

What then is the great charade and drunken orgy of January 1st? Why is it called New Year's Day? Here's some stuff I gleaned from the Net:

In 46 B.C.E. the Roman emperor Julius Caesar first established January 1st as New Year's Day. Janus was the Roman god of doors and gates, and had two faces, one looking forward and one back. Caesar felt that the month named after this god ("January") would be the appropriate "door" to the year. Caesar celebrated the first New Year by ordering

the violent routing of revolutionary Jewish forces in the Galilee. Eyewitnesses say blood flowed in the streets. In later years, Roman pagans observed the New Year by engaging in drunken orgies - a ritual they believed constituted a personal reenactment of the chaotic world that existed before the cosmos was set in order by the gods.

As Christianity spread, pagan holidays were either incorporated into the Christian calendar or abandoned altogether. By the early medieval period, most of Christian Europe regarded Annunciation Day (March 25) as the beginning of the year. According to Catholic tradition, Annunciation Day commemorates the announcement to Mary that she would be miraculously impregnated and conceive a son.

After William the Conqueror became King of England on December 25, 1066, he decreed that the English return to the date established by the Roman pagans, January 1st as New Year's. This move ensured that the commemoration of Jesus' birthday (December 25) would align with William's coronation, and the commemoration of Jesus' circumcision (January 1st) would start the New Year – thus uniting the English and Christian calendars and his own Coronation. William's innovation was eventually rejected, and England rejoined the rest of the Christian world and returned to celebrating New Year's Day on March 25.

On New Years Day, 1577, Pope Gregory XIII decreed that all Roman Jews, under pain of death, must listen attentively to the compulsory Catholic conversion sermon given in Roman synagogues after Friday night services. On New Year's Day, 1578, Gregory signed into law a tax forcing Jews to pay for the support of a "House of Conversion" to convert Jews to Christianity. On New Year's, 1581, Gregory ordered his

troops to confiscate all sacred literature from the Roman Jewish community. Thousands of Jews were murdered in the campaign.

Throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods, January 1st - supposedly the day on which Jesus' circumcision began the reign of Christianity and the death of Judaism - was reserved for anti-Jewish activities: synagogue and book burnings, public tortures, and murder.

The Israeli term for New Year's night celebrations, "Sylvester," was the name of the "Saint" and Roman Pope who reigned during the Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.). The year before the Council of Nicaea convened, Sylvester convinced Constantine to prohibit Jews from living in Jerusalem. At the Council of Nicaea, Sylvester arranged for the passage of a host of viciously anti-Semitic legislation. All Catholic "Saints" are awarded a day on which Christians celebrate and pay tribute to that Saint's memory. December 31 is Saint Sylvester Day - hence celebrations on the night of December 31 are dedicated to Sylvester's memory.

I'm not presenting this to get down on the goyim. What they do is their business. Rather, this concise history of January 1st should make Jews think twice before they celebrate New Year's and take part in its heathen festivities. With such a rich and wonderful heritage as ours, why copy the imposters? Why make drunken slob out of ourselves when we are sons of the King? We have the real Rosh Hashanah and the Torah of truth. Why join the drunken countdown celebrating the circumcision of Jezeus ? To me, it doesn't make any sense.

The Jezeus Myth

In a previous blog, we learned how New Year's Day was steeped in the idolatry of Christianity. Today's blog is intended for the tens of thousands of our brothers and sisters around the world who have been duped, trapped, mentally raped, and spiritually defiled by the soul and body snatchers of "Jews for Jezeus."

Brothers and sisters, wake up! Run for your lives! The people surrounding you, who profess to love you, are lying to you! They hate you! They hate the Jew in you and seek to extinguish your soul!

Wake up and know the truth! Jesus is as much of a god as Zeus! It's all a myth and fairytale. Harry Potter, Santa Claus, and Peter Pan are divine just as much as he is. Listen to what I am saying. Leave all their brainwashing aside and use the intellect G-d gave you.

G-d is G-d. By definition, there is only One G-d, not three or four, or a dozen. G-d always existed – He wasn't born in a manger. G-d is Divine, not a corporal being born of a woman. Return to your senses! G-d is eternal – He can't be killed and nailed on a cross.

What nonsense they fed you, taking advantage of your lack of knowledge, of your unhappiness in life, of your feelings of not being loved. So out of your innocence, and confusion, and longing to belong, you let them rape your sacred Jewish soul.

Listen to the Bible, my friends! You've heard of the Ten Commandments, right? Everyone believes in them – even the Christians and Catholics and all of their offshoots. What does it say there?

"I AM THE L-RD YOUR G-D, YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER G-DS BEFORE ME!!!!"

Do you hear? NO OTHER G-DS. Not Zeus, or Apollo, or Bachuus, or Jesus, nor all of the rest.

What else does it say?

"THOU SHALL NOT MAKE FOR YOURSELF ANY CARVED IDOL, OR ANY LIKENESS THAT IS IN HEAVEN ABOVE, OR IN THE EARTH BELOW...."

Do you hear, my friends? No statues of Jesus or Mary or Peter and Paul.

Look around you! What do you see! Statues, and crucifixes, and Virgin Marys, and Christs on the cross! Those are idols, my friend. People bow down to them, don't they? They're worshipping idols, and they've got you doing the same!

Brothers and sisters, come home! Come back to your true noble heritage, to your true Jewish roots! Come back to the ONE and ONLY G-d of Israel.

Jew for Jezeus is FAKE!! Run away as fast as you can! Don't speak with anyone! Don't express your doubts! Just get away! While everyone else is getting stoned and drunk tonight, just slip away. Get on the bus, Gus. Don't need to discuss much. Just get yourself free!

Land of Giants

If we could dissect a soul, what would we discover inside? What would a microscopic examination reveal? What are a soul's components? What are its atoms? When we probe as deeply as we can into the anatomy of the soul, suddenly under our high-powered lens, an *Alef* comes into focus. Then we see a *Mem*, and a *Taf*. If a soul had a genetic make-up, we would discover that its DNA helix is made up of Hebrew letters.

In the wisdom of the Kabbalah, letters are understood to be powerful, life-giving forces. The Gemara teaches that the Hebrew letters were used to create the heaven and earth (Berachot 55A). Bezalel knew how to combine the letters which were used in Creation. It was this secret wisdom which enabled him to build the Mishkan (Ibid).

Just as the Hebrew letters are the building blocks of Torah, and of the world, they combine to form the molecular blueprint of the soul. What atoms are to the physical world, Hebrew letters are to the spiritual.

Rabbi Kook writes:

"The soul is filled with letters which are infused with the light of life, full of knowledge and will, full of spiritual seeking, and full existence." (Orot, 1:7).

The soul is filled with letters which contain the Divine life force which grants us existence. They themselves have knowledge and will and a

quest for spiritual inspiration. All of a Jew's primary activities, whether his thought, will, deed, and imagination, stem from the letters of his soul. Different combinations of letters make for different types of souls. There are high-powered combinations, and there are souls of lesser might. According to the brilliance of these life-giving letters, a man's soul radiates with more and more energy.

Not only is the soul filled with Hebrew letters, *mitzvot* are filled with them, too. Rabbi Kook writes:

"Upon approaching a *mitzvah*, the *mitzvah* is always full of the light of life of all of the worlds - every *mitzvah* is filled with letters, big, incredible letters from among all of the 613 precepts" (Ibid).

The *mitzvot* are the channels which enable letters to flow from their Divine source to the soul. The life force in the *mitzvot* adds vitality to the life force in man. They are the circuits and conduits of life. And they too, like the letters, are microcosms of existence, bursting with the energy which G-d supplies to the world.

When a Jew performs a *mitzvah*, he receives a new dose of energy and life. When the letters of his soul collide and combine with the letters of the *mitzvah*, an explosion occurs. Like a fusion of atoms, new life is released to the soul and to all of the worlds. The union of the soul and the *mitzvah* is what gives the world its constant renewal. And because each individual *mitzvah* is integrally connected to all of the 613 precepts of the Torah, when we perform one *mitzvah*, we release the power of them all in a chain reaction which sends waves of holiness and

light throughout the universe. This is the mechanism which brings life to the world. Thus, our Sages have taught that if the Jews were to stop learning Torah, G-d forbid, for even a moment, the whole world would come to an end (Shabbat 88A).

This is how Rabbi Kook describes it:

"As soon as we approach a commandment's performance, all of the living letters which constitute our essence expand - we grow bigger, and become stronger and more forceful in the light of life and sublime existence which is resplendent and rich with the wealth of universal holiness and with the light of Torah and of wisdom....and all of the universe is renewed with light and life. The judgment of the world turns meritorious because of our deeds; light and truth, good will and inward satisfaction grace every face."

When a Jew performs a *mitzvah*, the letters of his or her soul are magnified with an accelerated life force. Letters of Torah from the upper worlds of existence merge with the letters of the individual soul. This "wedding" between the upper and lower worlds causes a union of splendor and joy. Our will and G-d's will become one. We and the world are filled with supernal strength, wisdom, holiness, valor, harmony, and joy. The same wholeness which returned to the world upon the giving of the Torah now returns to our souls. In the meeting of man and the *mitzvah*, the purpose of life is achieved. Man stands in line with G-d's will for existence. The soul cleaves to G-d. Worlds merge, and the union brings rebirth to all of Creation.

Because of the soul's connection to all the world, each seemingly small *mitzvah* is, in truth, a cosmic deed which fills the world with untold blessing. The performance of a *mitzvah* fills the world with Torah, and with inner goodness and truth. We hold in our hands the fate of existence. Our good deeds infuse the world with merit. By observing the commandments of the Torah, we not only elevate our own life, we make the world a better place. In the Heavenly court, G-d's judgment is sweetened.

In effect, the Almighty has put in our hands the key to existence. Divine blessing and life are released in the world according to what we do (Nefesh HaChaim, Gate 1:3).

Now, my friends, fasten your seat belts.

IN *ERETZ YISRAEL*, THE LETTERS OF OUR SOUL GROW BIGGER. THEY ARE MAGNIFIED **THOUSANDS AND THOUSANDS OF TIMES**, EVEN WITHOUT DOING A *MITZVAH*, BECAUSE JUST BEING IN ISRAEL IS A *MITZVAH* IN ITSELF.

Rabbi Kook writes:

"In *Eretz Yisrael*, the letters of our souls grow bigger; there they reveal shining light; they are nurtured with independent life from the light of life of the whole Congregation of Israel; they are directly influenced from the secret of their original creation."

In simple language, Rabbi Kook is saying that if there were a Geiger counter which could measure the existence of Hebrew letters, it would start to crackle with a thunderous noise the moment it approached the borders of Israel. For *Eretz Yisrael* is the Land of **GIGANTIC, 3-D LETTERS**. It is the land of indigenous **ALEFS** and **BETS**. Like the giants which the Spies encountered in Hebron, and the gigantic fruit they found in the Land, the alphabet of *Eretz Yisrael* dwarfs the Lilliputian alphabet of the Diaspora. The letters thrive in the air of Israel and draw body-building nutrients from its holy soil. In contrast, the letters of *Chut'z L'Aretz* (outside of the Land) are stunted, like plants grown outside of their natural climate.

When a Jew makes aliyah to *Eretz Yisrael*, his letters shift into high gear and multiply in size. **All of his being gets bigger**. He grows closer to G-d. Compared to the person he was in *galut*, he becomes larger than life. He transforms into a giant, filled with greater valor, greater holiness, greater happiness, and wisdom.

What is the secret of this change?

IN ERETZ YISRAEL, OUR LETTERS, LIKE OUR SOULS, BECOME THE GIGANTIC LETTERS OF **CLAL YISRAEL**. They are no longer small, private, individual letters of the Diaspora, living private individual lives - THEY MULTIPLY AND MULTIPLY THROUGH THEIR UNION WITH THE NATION OF ISRAEL. IN THE LAND OF **CLAL YISRAEL**, OUR LETTERS MERGE WITH THE **MEGA-SOUL OF THE NATION**, and not just

with the neighborhood *shul*.

In his connection to the NATION, the *Oleh* (immigrant) to Israel becomes a more complete Jew. He becomes a co-builder of the Jewish NATION. He becomes independent in his own Land. His aspirations are filled with idealism. He becomes an architect of history, an active partner of Redemption. His outlook and psyche are exponentially expanded by his new identification with the NATIONAL aspiration and will.

Because he is living in Israel, his whole life is a *mitzvah*. A *mitzvah* which is equal in weight to all of the mitzvot of the Torah (Sifre, Reah, 12:29). Divine life flows and flows into his being through the infinite channel of his new *mitzvah* life. His house is a *mitzvah*, his job is a *mitzvah*, every step which he takes in the Holy Land is a *mitzvah*, every four cubits earns him a greater share in the world to come (Ketubot 111A). Every holy breath he takes fills him with holy life. Letters and letters of Torah pour endlessly into his soul.

In his essay, Rabbi Kook quotes a verse from the book of Isaiah:

"And it shall come to pass, that he who is left in Zion, and he that remains in Jerusalem, they shall be called holy, everyone in Jerusalem who is written to life" (Isaiah, 4:3).

In *Eretz Yisrael* and Jerusalem, the letters of our souls are inscribed for eternal life. Like the Land's giant letters, the *mitzvot* of the Land are giant mitzvot too, performed where the commandments are supposed

to be performed, as the Ramban writes: “For the essence of all the mitzvot is that they be performed in the Land of *Hashem*” (Ramban of the Torah, Vayikra, 18:25; also Kuzari, 5:22). They burst with energy and life through the full force of their value. In Israel, the performance of the *mitzvot* is pure, without static and pollution, when performed in the land of G-d. In Israel, each *mitzvah* reverberates through the myriad of souls of the *Clal*, multiplying beyond measure, echoing through the universe, filling the world with harmony, completeness, and order. When the nation is living its true Torah life in Israel, G-d's will for the world is fulfilled. The vaults of heaven spread open, and Divine blessing flows uninterrupted to all of creation.

So too, the Torah of *Eretz Yisrael* is the complete Torah. As our Sages teach: “There is no Torah like the Torah of *Eretz Yisrael*” (Midrash Tehillim 105). The Torah in Israel is the all-encompassing Torah, the Torah of the nation, the Torah of the *Clal*, none of whose *mitzvot* or letters are missing. In the Land of Israel, The Torah is in its true place, radiating its influence in intimate pleasantness, its heavenly letters glowing with the light of the *Shechinah* (Ketubot 75A). In contrast, our Sages tell us the Torah in *galut* is shrouded in darkness. (Sanhedrin 24A).

So, my friends, you can be little, or **you can be big**. The choice is up to you.

(Excerpted from the book, “Eretz Yisrael” by Rabbi David Samson and yours truly. Chapter Seven)

Bye Bye Big American Lie

It wouldn't be right to let *Reb Shlomo's yahrtzeit* pass without a few words of thanks. Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach helped me cling to the Torah, and to the yearning to come to *Eretz Yisrael*, at the crossroads of my *t'shuva*, when the evil inclination rose up against me with all of its force to persuade me that I had fastened onto an illusion.

I only met Reb Shlomo once, briefly, in his apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. But his songs gave me the spiritual fuel I needed to overcome all of the obstacles and doubts that face a penitent when he, or she, commences upon a journey of return.

In those days, after having tasted the sweetness of Torah, I had left Hollywood and was living in New York, but my vision kept turning eastward toward Israel. In those early days of revelation and mind-blowing insight, when the darkness of my hitherto secular life miraculously vanished in the shattering brilliance of the Divine light that filled all of my being when I realized that there was a G-d, and that the Torah was true, and that *Eretz Yisrael* was the Land of the Jews, it was the soulful melodies of *Reb Shlomo*, the magnetic pull of his songs, the magical Hebrew of his words, and his heavenly whistling that pierced all of the barriers and lies of American culture and secular living, that seized my heart, pumping *Emunah* and belief through my veins, to keep me on course to Jerusalem.

Day after day, as I walked around the steel, concrete jungle of Manhattan, riding the subways, on the way to meetings and work, I would listen to his songs on the earphones of my Walkman, volume turned up high to blast out all of the old and deceiving tapes of America

- the lie that America was the greatest country in the world; the lie that American culture was the best; the lie that success and money and fame were the most important values; the lie that religion was for losers; that the Torah was a fairytale just like all other myths; the lie that I, too, was an American who must follow along with the stream, making capitalism my religion, and trying to be as beautiful and talented and successful and famous as the stars and writers of Hollywood. It was the whistling and humming and Biblical chords of Shlomo's guitar, pouring into my ears like a healing elixir that kept all the American falsehoods at bay, allowing me to cling to my incredible discovery that there was a G-d, and that the Torah was true, and that G-d wanted His children, the Jewish People, to live in Israel.

Day after day, Shlomo's songs seeped into my heart, my soul, and my brain, erasing the old lying tapes of America, and the big lie that I was an American like everyone else, replacing the deceptions and deceits with holy new tapes of truth – songs of praise to the Almighty, love songs of Torah, and longings for *Eretz Yisrael* and *Yerushalayim*.

At night, I would sit in my Manhattan apartment alone, listening to the songs of *Reb Shlomo*, the songs of *Hashem*, of Torah, and of Zion, sitting on the floor, facing a poster of the *Kotel*, praying over and over again like a mantra, "Please G-d, take me to Israel. Please G-d, take me to Israel."

But there where layers and layers of half-truths and deceptions that stood in my way and had to be overcome. Not only the lies of America, but the charade of Diaspora living as well, the misleading line of the Jewish establishment who assured me that I could keep the Torah in

America just as well as in Israel, that the *Mashiach* hadn't yet come, that the Temple still wasn't rebuilt, that the Land of Israel was also *galut*. Plus, they warned, it wasn't safe to live in Israel, and that the secular Israelis defiled the Holy Land, on and on and on to convince me not to go.

How confusing it can be to a newcomer starting out on the journey back to G-d! But I was lucky. G-d had come into my life in a miraculous way. I knew He was real. I knew the Torah was real. And I could read, in plain black and white in the Bible, that the place for the Jews, the place to keep the Torah, the place where G-d wanted me, and every Jew, to live was *Eretz Yisrael*. In my heart of heart, I knew it was true. I knew that to make my life count, and to be who I really was, to live a life of truth, and to please my Creator, I had to get to Israel. "You're right, Tzvi," Reb Shlomo's songs told me, "You're right. Follow your heart. Go to Jerusalem. *Yerushalayim, Yerushalayim, Yerushalayim, Yerushalayim.*"

So, my friends, do yourselves a big favor. Find a quiet place, sit down, and listen to some Carlebach songs. Forget about everything else. Junk all of the lies. Listen to the whistling. Listen to the words. Even if you don't understand them. Listen to the truth of the melody, to the soulful longings of the Jewish People in his voice, a longing of two thousand years, a longing for our Maker, a longing for our Torah, a longing for *Yerushalayim*, and for the holy mountains and Biblical valleys of *Eretz Yisrael*.

Thank you, *Reb Shlomo*. May your memory and your songs be an everlasting blessing to all the Jewish People.

The Next Best Thing

There is no question that the next best thing to living in the Land of Israel is to be a devoted, daily reader of INN, Israel National News.com. In its love for the Torah, *Eretz Yisrael*, and the entire Jewish Nation, no other website can compare to INN. Therefore, by attaching themselves to INN by reading it every day, readers are attaching themselves to the things INN stands for – to the Torah, to the settlement of the Land of Israel, and to the Jewish Nation as a whole. For Jews living in the Diaspora who would love to come on *aliyah*, but who are tragically unable to, for whatever real reasons they have, a lifeline dose of INN a few times a day is the next best thing.

Even for the likes of our most vehement anti-*aliyah* talkbackers, their devoted reading of INN demonstrates that their souls are connected to the Land of Israel, even though their heads and their bodies may be embedded in the quicksand of *galut*. Their criticisms and tirades are merely the distorted notions of goodhearted Jews who have been poisoned by a long and bitter exile. Nevertheless, their faithful reading of INN shows that their souls are pure. We know that it is merely their confusions and fears which prevent them from coming to Israel, even though they themselves secretly crave to be here. And on a deeper level, we know that it is the Land of Israel that is rejecting them, and not really they who are rejecting the Land, for this is a zealous Land, rejecting those who don't set Jerusalem above their chiefest joy. Their incessant talkbacks show that they truly want to be here, living a true

Jewish life. And for that, they are deserving of accolades and praise. They are our brothers, here in spirit, if not in the flesh. Their longing to be in Israel earns them a portion in the Land. Whether their reasons for not coming be justified or lame, their constant preoccupation with Israel via their love/hate relationship with INN proves their identification with the Land and the Jewish Nation.

All of them are our brothers, the lucky ones who come; the unfortunate ones who truly want to come, but can't; as well as the tormented ones who protest against the State of Israel as loudly as they can. All of them are the cream of the crop, the all-stars of *galut*. Their fervent addiction to INN, and their inner yearning for Israel, puts them here amongst us in spirit. Let all of us fortunate ones in Israel pray that their heads and living bodies will follow their spirits soon!

Prayer to Come to Israel

The famous *Tzaddik*, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov emphasizes the importance of pouring out one's heart before G-d in words of heartfelt, personal prayer, for all of our problems and needs. Here's a sample prayer that I wrote for coming to the Land of Israel:

My G-d and G-d of my Fathers, teach me how to pray in a way to draw down Your compassion, put words of fire in my mouth that will pierce through the darkness of my exile and shatter all of the barriers that stand between us, for I feel so far away from You. Fill my heart with a burning desire to come to Your Holy Land, where I can become the Jew that I was destined to be, to play my share in the great Redemption of Your people. For I know in my heart of hearts that only in the Land of Israel can I be who I really am, by returning to my roots, to the Homeland of the Jewish people, to the Land of my Forefathers, the Land of the Torah, where the Torah is meant to be kept, to the place that the Patriarchs longed to live, even when there were savages, and dangers, and idol worship throughout the Land.

Please, dear Father and King, fasten the call of the Psalmist firmly in my heart, that I set *"Jerusalem above my highest joy,"* and may my longing to be in the pleasant Land increase each day, so that wherever I travel, I will always be longing to come to the Land of Israel, as opposed to remaining here in the exile, in a foreign land, amongst foreign peoples, where we have been scattered in punishment for our sins, and the sins of our forefathers.

Help me, my Father in Heaven, to overcome all of the obstacles, all of the fears, all of the excuses, all of the voices within and without which talk against Your Holy Land, in an effort to discourage me from reaching my goal, which is the true purpose of the life of a Jew, to live a life of Torah in Your Holy Land. Grant me the privilege to achieve the great *tikun* and rectification that I came into the world to accomplish - by returning my Jewish body and soul to the Land of G-d, the Land of Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaacov, the Land of our Matriarchs, the Land that the eyes of *Hashem* watch over from the beginning of the year to the end. Deafen my ears to the complaints and criticisms of all the modern day Spies who speak badly against Your Chosen Land. Let me run away from them and their evil advice. Give me the strength to cling to what I know is the truth in my heart of hearts, to love the Land of Israel with all of my heart, and to set my path in a straight course for Zion, the dream of our people for three thousand years, looking neither to the left nor the right, in order to reach the golden shores of the Land of Israel and to roll in its dust, just like our Sages of old.

Please, G-d, give me the exalted honor of coming to Israel, even though I be small in merit and filled with fears and worries about the unknown. But I know that you are Master of the World, Creator of the universe, and that You surely can provide for me and for my family, especially for someone who longs to please You by giving up everything he has known, in order to perform Your will by coming to the Land of Israel.

Open my eyes to see all of the miracles of the past hundred years, how You have brought Your people home from the four corners of the world, granted us triumph over our enemies, rebuilt the barren wasteland, and raised the Nation of Israel from out of the ashes of the

Holocaust to become a marvel in the eyes of the nations, thus restoring honor to Your Name. Let me always remember that it is You who has done all this incredible rebuilding, that this is the realization of the words of our Prophets of old, who all promised that G-d would bring us back to our eternal Homeland.

Save me, *Hashem*, from the bondage of my exile in a foreign land, and rescue me. Grant me the fortitude and the inner will and conviction to come to *Eretz Yisrael*, knowing that You are with me, to help me in everything I need, and to give me the strength and blessing to overcome all challenges, that are really designed to elevate me in Your service and make me a better, more complete person and Jew.

Thank You, *Hashem*, for making me realize and understand the vital importance of coming to Israel. It has lit up my life like a bolt of lightning in the depth of the night of my exile. Please, my G-d, strengthen my desire each day, and in Your infinite kindness, bring me home soon to the Land of Life, to the Land of Israel. Amen.

The Long and Rocky Road

Readers ask why I don't just delete Mike's Israel-bashing talkbacks and thus make cyberspace a better place to hang out. Since his comments are always the same ranting on about the Israeli government being in cahoots with the Muslims to wipe out the settlers, and Israeli soldiers raping young Jewish girls (who were assaulted at Amona, but not raped,) I don't bother to read them anymore. Nonetheless, his arguments, and the anti-*Medinat Yisrael* talkbacks of others, do serve a purpose, in forcing us to clarify issues and explain matters which people haven't had an opportunity to learn, because the questions surrounding the Redemption of Israel simply weren't, and still aren't, addressed in the traditional frames of Diaspora learning.

For instance, there are talkbackers who constantly criticize the bad things in Israel. They cite the imperfections of Israeli society as their reason for not coming to live here. They write as if things are supposed to be perfect. This is simply a total misunderstanding of Torah.

Life in Israel wasn't perfect in the days of Avraham, when idol worship filled the Land, nor was the situation any better when G-d commanded Yehoshua to bring the Jews into the Promised Land when it was occupied by seven corrupt and immoral pagan nations.

Our job is to roll up our sleeves, conquer our enemies, dry up the swamps, and rebuild our desolate cities. Not to wait comfortably in exile until G-d waves His magic wand and makes all the bad things vanish. G-d created the Jewish People, not to run away from the work

of improving the world, but the very opposite - to lead mankind to “*tikun*,” or rectification. We have been put into the world to become partners with G-d in bringing an imperfect world to completion. To fix, not to complain.

The problems, corruptions, weaknesses, and challenges in building a Torah State, which characterize an aspect of life in Israel today, don’t mean that we are on the wrong course. Not in the least. This is precisely the course which G-d wants us to travel. For instance, the highway leading to Jerusalem isn’t straight. There are many windings in the road, steep inclines, and plummeting descents. Just as there are *aliyot* and *yeridot* on the way to Jerusalem, there are *aliyot* and *yeridot* on the way to Redemption. This is the way it is. Only a child thinks otherwise. Only a child expects to receive things immediately, and that everything be complete from the start.

How do I know that this is way that things are supposed to be? For one thing, our Sages have taught us that this is precisely how things would unfold, as it says in the Talmud: “In the generation of the *Mashiach*’s coming, Torah scholars will grow few in number, there will be great suffering and harsh decrees, so that before a hardship passes another one will already begin. Institutions of learning will turn into brothels, and settlers from the border towns will wander around from place to place without rest. The wisdom of rabbis will decrease, the fear of sin will be ridiculed, there will be no upright judges and policemen, truth will disappear, and the face of the generation will be like the face of a dog” (Sanhedrin 97A-98B).

The Talmud goes on to report that Rabbi Ula and Rabba said that they don't want to be alive to witness the suffering that will precede the time of *Mashiach*. Rabbi Yosef refuted them by saying that he would be glad to sit in the shade of a pile of the dung of *Mashiach's* donkey to have the merit of being alive in those times. In other words, even though the material corruption of those times will be so abundant, that you can sit in the shade of its dung, he would be happy to play a part in the return of the Jewish People to Israel and the rebuilding of the Nation of Israel which the *Mashiach* represents.

According to Mike, the dung heap in Israel couldn't get any higher than it already is. Which means that G-d's plan for Redemption is right on schedule. Things are exactly the way they are meant to be at this stage of Jewish history. So, be happy – don't worry! The *Mashiach* is on the way!

End of the Exile

The joyous holiday of *Tu B'Shvat* celebrates our great gratitude to G-d over the trees and fruits of *Eretz Yisrael*. Why the trees of the Land of Israel and not the trees of America or Canada? In the same way that it wouldn't make sense for a Chinaman to have a holiday over the rice of India, the Jewish People thank G-d for the fruits indigenous to the Land of Israel, and not for the fruits found in foreign places.

Why? Because a Jew is supposed to live here, in the Land that G-d gave us, and not live in the lands of the gentiles.

Isn't this perfectly obvious?

The reason that Jews have been living outside of the Land of Israel, in exile, for nearly two thousand years is because the gentiles attacked our country, slaughtered millions of Jews, and banished the survivors to the four corners of the earth. The exile is a punishment, not something to cling to and rejoice over.

And now that G-d in His infinite kindness has brought us back to our Homeland, gathering His scattered children and rebuilding, in miraculous fashion, a reborn Jewish State, it is time for us to come home.

Isn't this perfectly obvious?

Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook lived in a tiny apartment in the Geula neighborhood of Jerusalem. On one of the walls were pictures of his father, Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook, and an old photograph of his grandfather, the renowned Torah scholar, the “*Aderet*.” There was also a photograph of another bearded Jew – Herzl, looking perfectly in place with the rabbis on the wall. Alongside the photographs was a drawing of a sunrise over a mountain, with the caption: “So too unfolds the Redemption of Israel – in the beginning, little by little.”

The quote is from the Jerusalem Talmud: “Rabbi Hiyah Rabbah and Rabbi Shimon Ben Halafta were walking in the Arbel Valley at the break of morning before the light of day. They watched the dawn as the light began to shine. Rabbi Hiyah, the great one in wisdom, said to Rabbi Halafta, ‘Rabbi, so too unfolds the Redemption of Israel – in the beginning, little by little. And the more it progresses, it increases and grows’” (Berachot, 1:1).

Both Rabbi Kook and his son, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda, taught that the thrust of the Torah, of the Prophets, of our holidays and prayers, all point toward the Redemption of Israel with our return to Jerusalem and *Eretz Yisrael*.

Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda emphasized again and again at the *Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva*, and in the classes he gave in his home, that the long-awaited Redemption was taking place in our time with the ingathering of the exiles, with the restoration of Jewish sovereignty over *Eretz Yisrael*, and with the widespread return to Torah.

He was always baffled by the phenomenon that Jews continued to live in the exile, as if Israel were a foreign country, and the foreign country where they were living was home!

“What is *galut*?” he asked. “An aberration. In our normal, healthy state, we need to be here, the entire Nation of Israel, in the Land of Israel. And all of the Land of Israel needs to be in our hands! Thank G-d, *Hashem*’s light is shining on us now, and increasing in strength, little by little, in gradual stages, as our Sages have told us, in stages and not all at once.”

Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda once again pointed to the Gemara for the definitive sign of Redemption:

“The Sages, may their memory be for a blessing, gave us a clear definition of the end of the exile. They cite the verse from the Book of Ezekiel, *‘You O mountains of Israel shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel, for they will soon be coming.’* Rashi comments that there can be no surer sign of the end of the exile than this, when the trees of the Land of Israel give forth their fruits in abundance” (Sanhedrin 98A).

“We need to open our eyes,” Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda said. “We have to see, eye-to-eye, with our vision in line with the Divine perspective, in order to see what *Hashem* is doing, as it says, *‘For they shall see eye-to-eye, the L-rd returning to Zion.’* Today we are moving forward with the resettlement of the Land, overcoming obstacles and errors along the way, progressing and coming closer to *‘a new light on Zion.’* The desecration of G-d’s Name caused by the presence of Jews in the exile,

and its terrible disgrace, will disappear, and, more and more, we will merit to sanctify the Name of the L-rd in our midst.”

During the festive *Tu B'Shvat* meal, when we enjoy the fruits of *Eretz Yisrael*, we first begin by eating the fruits that are closest to the word “*eretz*” in the Torah verse, “*A land (eretz) of wheat, barley, and grapes, and figs, and pomegranates; a land (eretz) of olive oil and date honey.*”

So too, Rabbi Kook taught, “Whoever is closer to the Land of Israel; whoever has a greater love (for)^[SP1] her and exerts himself more ardently in the settlement of the Holy Land, he is blessed first, and he is closer to perfection.”

Happy *Tu B'Shvat*!

Bagel Judaism

I'm writing this on my laptop while waiting for a stopover flight in the Brussels airport, on my way to LA to sign a writing contract for the development of a dynamite new sitcom called "Susie the Hairdresser." Before I left Israel, my Hollywood agent called once again saying that he had received another offer from the Southern California Kabbalah Meditation and Health Center. They are willing to pay me \$10,000 to sit one day a week in their center, so that people can touch my beard. Apparently, they intend to hide transparent, fiberglass wires in my beard so that people will feel an electric current when they touch it, so that the center can advertise its healing powers.

But what I want to share with you here is the strangest thing. It happened at the Ben Gurion Terminal just as I was waiting to board the airplane. Suddenly, an old man appeared beside me and said, "Whatever you do, don't eat a bagel."

"Why not?" I asked.

"You'll fall asleep for 2000 years."

Before I could ask him why, the line surged forward, and I had to show my boarding pass to get on the plane. When I looked back, the old man was gone.

Once we were in the air, I had time to ponder the meaning of the unexpected encounter. If truth be known, ever since I had accepted the offer to come to Hollywood, I had a craving to eat a bagel, a real Jewish American bagel. True, in Israel, we have the *Kotel*, and the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hevron, and the Sea of Galilee, and the holy gravesites of

Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochair and the Arizal, to cite but two. But we don't have real bagels. With all of our Israeli know-how, we have never been able to come up with a real Jewish, New York bagel. And here I was dreaming about chomping into a real, fat tasty American bagel when a mysterious old man approached me with his chilling warning, that if I ate one, I would go to sleep for 2000 years.

Flying over the Mediterranean Sea, I suddenly realized what he was saying. 2000 is about the time we have been in exile, living in foreign lands. Now the countries of the Diasporas may be very enjoyable places, like the taste of a bagel, but something is missing. Diasporas can come in all sorts of flavors, just like plain, sesame, onion, and whole wheat bagels, but they are all empty in the middle. The center, the Land of Israel, is missing! Diasporas have synagogues, and *Shabbat*, and *kashrut*, and yeshivas, but the center, the focus and national component of Judaism are missing. Without the Land of Israel and Jerusalem, and all of the *mitzvot* that apply only in the Land, and children who grow up naturally speaking Hebrew, and a school system that follows the Hebrew calendar, the Judaism of the Diaspora lacks a whole lot. Just like a bagel, the outside ring is tasty, but the center is missing. That's why Jews in the Diaspora have fallen asleep for 2000 years. Yes, like a bagel, the Judaism of the Diaspora has all the surrounding trappings, but it is missing its heart. If you relish the bagel and don't notice the hole, then you're sleeping. That was the old man's message. "Beware lest your Judaism turns into Bagelism." That's what King David was trying to tell us when he penned, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem."

I don't know about you, but I'm not taking any chances. To heck with the money. I'm flying back to Israel today!

Happy Purim!

“The Diaspora Code”

There is an opinion in the Talmud that our Forefathers were born in the month of Nissan, so after the morning *mikvah*, I drove to Hevron this morning to wish them a happy birthday, to pay my respects before the *Pesach* holiday, and to gain strength against the evil counsel of the Spies amongst us, as just Joshua and Caleb did in the past.

Usually, I ignore my anti-Israel talkbackers and their rantings against the supreme *mitzvah* of *aliyah*, but since there are always new readers to this blog, we are forced to repeat certain fundamental matters, lest the newcomers be led astray by their poison.

First, let the following be clear to everyone - it is a *mitzvah* from the Torah to live in the Land of Israel. Our Sages considered this *mitzvah* equal in weight to all of the other commandments in the Torah. This *mitzvah* applies in every generation. All of the Torah authorities, both the *Rishonim* and *Achronim*, agree on this matter. This *mitzvah* is not dependant on the danger involved, nor on the level of religious observance of the government, nor on the moral purity of its political leaders, nor on whether *Medinat Yisrael* is pleasing in one's eyes or not. It is *mitzvah* to live in Israel, even if the *Mashiach* hasn't yet come, even if Tzvi Fishman's blogs turn you off, even if you will have to settle for a second rate golf course.

Let's take another look at the universally-recognized classic on Jewish faith, “The Kuzari.” The book was written by Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi in the form of a conversation between a Rabbi and the non-Jewish king of Kuzar, a seeker of the true path to G-d. In a long and detailed discourse,

the Rabbi explains that the true service of G-d is only in the Land of Israel. Among the very long list of its praises he says:

“The Patriarchs yearned for it and endeavored to live in the Country, even though it was in the hands of pagans.”

This means that it is a *mitzvah* to make *aliyah* whether pagans rule over Israel or corrupt Jewish politicians. This *mitzvah* applies to all Jews, except for our persistent complainers, who are apparently holier and far more intelligent than our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaacov.

The “Kuzari” continues, citing the *halachic* law:

“Concerning a woman who refuses to move there with her husband, our Sages decreed that she is divorced and that she forfeits her marriage settlement. On the other hand, if the husband refuses to accompany his wife to Israel, he is bound to divorce her and pay her *Ketubah*. They further say that it is better to dwell in the Holy Land, even in a town mostly inhabited by idol worshippers than in the Diaspora, even in a town mostly inhabited by Jews; for he who dwells in the Holy Land is compared to him who has a G-d, whilst he who dwells outside the Land is compared to him who has no G-d. Thus said David, *‘For they have driven me out this day from living in the place that is the inheritance of the L-rd, saying go and serve other gods,’* which means that he who dwells in the Diaspora is as if he served strange gods.”

When the Rabbi finishes praising the transcendental value of living in the Land of Israel, the king of Kuzar chastises him, saying:

“If this be so, thou fallest short of the duty laid down in thy Law, by not endeavoring to reach that place, and making it thy abode in life and

death. Is it not the gate of Heaven? All peoples agree on this point. Christians believe that the souls are gathered there and then lifted up to heaven. Islam teaches that it is the place of the ascent. All the Jews turn to it in prayer. Thus thy bowing down and kneeling in its direction is either mere appearance or thoughtless worship. Yet your first forefathers chose it as their abode, and lived there as strangers, rather than as citizens in their own country. This they did even in a time when the *Shechinah* was not yet visible, and the country was full of unchastity, impurity, and idolatry. Your forefathers, however, had no other desire than to remain in it. Neither did they leave it in times of dearth and famine except by G-d's permission. Finally, they directed their bones to be buried there."

The Rabbi answers in shame and disgrace:

"This is a severe reproach, O king of the Kuzars. It is the sin which kept the Divine promise with regard to the Second Temple from being fulfilled. Divine Providence was ready to restore everything as it had been at first, if they all had willingly consented to return. But only a part was ready to do so, whilst the majority and the aristocracy amongst them remained in Babylon, preferring dependence and slavery, unwilling to leave their mansions and their affairs. Had we been prepared to meet the G-d of our forefathers with an honest mind, we would have found the same salvation as our fathers did in Egypt. If we say in our prayers, '*Worship at His holy hill; worship at His footstool; He who restoreth His glory to Zion,*' and other words of this nature, this is but as the chattering of the starling and the nightingale. We do not realize what we say by this sentence, nor others, as thou rightly observes, O king of the Kuzars" (Kuzari, 2:22-25).

The story concludes as follows, and I quote at length for readers who have not yet studied this monumental classic:

“The Rabbi was then concerned to leave the land of the Kuzars and to betake himself to Jerusalem. The king was loath to let him go, and spoke to him in this sense as follows: ‘What can be sought in the Land of Israel nowadays, since the *Shechinah* is absent from it, whilst with a pure mind and desire, one can approach G-d in any place. Why wilt thou run into danger on land and on sea, and among the various peoples living there?’”

The Rabbi answers: “The Land of Israel is especially distinguished by the L-rd of Israel, and no religious function can be perfect except there. Many of the Jewish laws do not concern those who do not live there; and heart and soul are only perfectly pure and immaculate in the place which is specially selected by G-d. The danger one runs on land and sea does not come under the category of, ‘*You shall not tempt the L-rd,*’ which refers to risks which one takes when traveling with merchandise in hope of gain. However, he who incurs even greater danger on account of his ardent desire to reach a state of cleanliness in his service of G-d is free from reproach. He braves danger, and if he escapes, he praises G-d gratefully. But should he perish through his sins, he obtains the Divine favor, and he may be confident that he has atoned for most of his sins by his death.”

The king tries to dissuade him with the following argument: “I thought thou didst love freedom, but I now see thee finding new religious duties which thou will be obliged to fulfill in the Land of Israel, even though they are in abeyance here.”

The Rabbi answers: “I only seek freedom from the service of those numerous people whose favor I do not care for, and shall never obtain, though I work for it all my life. Even if I could obtain it, it would not profit me – I am speaking of the service of men and courting their favor. I would rather seek the service of the One whose favor is obtained with the smallest effort, yet it profits in this world and the next. This is the favor of G-d. His service spells freedom, and humility before Him is true honor.”

In other words, we have to stop trying to be good Americans and Frenchman and South Africans in foreign countries, and be true servants of *Hashem* in His eternally Chosen Land.

The Rabbi concludes: “This means that Jerusalem can only be rebuilt when the Jewish People yearn for it to such an extent that they embrace her stones and dust.”

Finally, the king of the Kuzars gives in: “If this is the case, it would be a sin to hinder thee. It is on the contrary a merit to assist thee. May G-d grant thee His help, and be thy protector and friend. Amen.”

This isn't a story I made up. This is straight, word-by-word text from “The Kuzari,” which is universally recognized as a classic of Jewish faith by all streams of Orthodox Judaism. You may never have learned it – precisely because of what it teaches – that that most perfect service of G-d is in Israel. Could it be that there's a big conspiracy to keep this stuff a secret? Now that I think about it – it's a good name for a book – “The Diaspora Code.” What do you think?

Spy vs Spy

The sin of the Spies in the wilderness is arguably the greatest transgression in Jewish history. It resulted in the destruction of the entire generation that left Egypt. Because of the refusal of the Spies to journey on to live in the Land of Israel, the Jews had to wander for forty years in the desert until a braver generation arose. Additionally, our Sages tell us that the sin of the Spies paved the way to the destruction of the First and Second Temples. After touring the Land of Israel, the Spies returned with their evil report on the Ninth of Av, the same day that the Temples were later destroyed. Because they rejected the Promised Land, we were later expelled from its borders.

However, there is a very big difference between the Spies in the wilderness who refused to make *aliyah*, and Diaspora Jews of today who also don't come on *aliyah*.

The Spies in the wilderness, and their entire generation, KNEW they were supposed to journey on to Israel. Moshe told them over and over again. G-d commanded them again and again. They knew they were leaving Egypt to return to the Promised Land. They knew it because it was their heritage. Their fathers told them, their mothers told them, their grandparents told them. All the time that they were slaves in Egypt, they waited for the moment when a redeemer would come to take them out of Egyptian bondage and return them to *Eretz Yisrael*, to the Land of their forefathers, Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaacov.

Furthermore, the Spies knew that their mission was to spy out the Land so that their reconnaissance information could help in conquering it. But instead of going up to Israel and settling the Land, as G-d had

commanded them, they wanted to stay in the wilderness where the Cloud of Glory protected them with arrow-proof walls, and year-round air conditioning and comfort. There, in the hermetically-sealed dome of the Cloud, they could study Torah while their physical needs were miraculously provided by the *Manna* from Heaven and the well of Miriam that followed them wherever they went. That was their surface excuse. The book "*Mesillat Yesharim*" explains the underlying reason, stating that the Spies, who were the leaders of the community, feared to journey on to Israel lest they suffer a lessening of their prestige and honor, since a new type of leader would be needed upon entry into the Land, in order to actively confront the many physical and spiritual challenges they faced ("*Mesillat Yesharim*," Ch. 19, On Saintliness.) In rebelling against G-d by not making *aliyah* to Israel, they brought about the death of their generation and caused great future tragedy as well.

In contrast, the Jews of the Diaspora today are very different.

The main difference is that, by and large, they simply don't know that they should come on *aliyah*. No one teaches them. Not their rabbis, not their high-school yeshiva teachers, not their *shul* presidents, not the sisterhood, not their parents, no one. So, they simply don't know that the true goal of Judaism is to establish the Kingdom of G-d in the world via the Jewish People leading a Torah life in Israel, as it says, "*For from ZION shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the L-rd from JERUSALEM.*"

Even in the books they read about Judaism, *Eretz Yisrael* has been deleted. Take a look at a few indexes of the most popular books in English on Jewish Philosophy. You won't find a word about *Eretz Yisrael*.

True, a Jewish Internet surfer might be carried by a wave one day to Arutz 7, where he will be confronted with the importance of *aliyah*, but not having heard about this great foundation of Judaism from his teachers and parents, he is likely not to take it to heart.

For this reason, the Jews of the Diaspora are like “children who were kidnapped and raised amongst the gentiles.” This category includes Jews who were never taught about Judaism. Not having been exposed to the tenets of the religion, unfortunate Jews like these can’t be expected to keep the Torah’s laws, because they have never heard of them. The secular Zionists pioneers and kibbutzniks fall into this category, as do the secular Russian Jews in Israel today, even though they have heard of the Torah, they never had anyone to teach them, so it is something foreign to them, like Chinese.

A metaphor for this is the story of Tarzan, who was lost at sea as a child and raised in the jungle by apes. When he grew up, he thought he was a monkey, too. There was no one around to tell him that he was a man. So he identified with the apes. Just as they felt perfectly at home, living in the jungle and swinging from tree to tree, he felt perfectly at home too, aping their habits. Not having been raised in civilized surroundings, he didn’t know the difference.

But, of course, a human isn’t an ape, even if he grows up in the jungle. And a Jew isn’t a gentile, even if he grows up in a gentile land. A Jew isn’t an American, or a Frenchman, or a South African, even if he grows up there. A Jew has a homeland of his own, with his own code of life, the Torah, which is meant to be lived in Israel.

The Jews of the Diaspora don't know this, because no one ever taught them. They are not to blame for thinking they are at home in strange lands, no more than Tarzan was to blame for believing that he was at home in the jungle. It's as simple as that.

Truman Show

One of the things that a Jew is supposed to remember each day is that *Hashem* took us out of bondage in Egypt. Since our Sages tell us that a person should start learning about a holiday thirty days before its arrival, now is a fine time to learn a bit about *Pesach*.

We are supposed to remember each day that *Hashem* took us out of bondage in Egypt because *Hashem* wants us always to remember that we don't belong in a foreign land. For a Jew, being in a land other than *Eretz Yisrael* is being in mental, physical, psychological, spiritual, and cultural bondage.

This is the big lesson of the festival of *Pesach*. It comes along every year to remind us that we don't belong in foreign lands, whether it be the Egypt of old, or the America, Canada, Belgium, or Mexico of today.

Also, in our Sabbath and holiday prayers, we always say that the giving of the Sabbath, and our holidays, are reminders of the exodus from Egypt. The understanding that we don't belong in foreign lands is the cornerstone of our essence as a Jewish Nation and our personal identities as Jews.

The reason that we are called upon to remember this every day, every Sabbath, and every holiday, is that there is a *yetzer* (evil inclination) to forget. Someone who lives in foreign bondage in a gentile land doesn't like to be reminded of it. He'd rather forget the sordid truth of his situation. In a sense, he's sleeping, living in a dream world. He doesn't want to have his bubble burst, so he pretends that everything is OK. Forgetfulness is common to creatures of flesh and blood, so *Hashem* is

constantly reminding us that we're not supposed be living in gentile lands.

The truth is that the exile in Egypt was a lot better than the exile today. At least in Egypt, we knew we were in bondage. We knew we were living in a foreign country. We knew we were imprisoned. We could see the bars.

Today, the Jews who live in the Diaspora don't see the reality of their situation. They don't think they're in bondage. They don't even feel that they are living in a foreign land. So they don't see any reason to leave.

In a sense, Jonathan Pollard, for all of the horror of his situation, is better off than everyone else in the Diaspora. At least he knows that he is in prison. Everyone else lives with the myth that he's free! The truth is that they are just as captive as Jonathan, only they don't see the bars of their cell.

It's a lot like the movie, "The Truman Show." It turned out that the hero was living in a fake, illusionary world. He thought it was real, but it wasn't. Only when a light fixture (like a Fishman blog) fell down from the fake sky did he begin to suspect that something was fishy.

It turned out he was living in a sort of sci-fi prison. He thought he was free, but he wasn't. He thought things were real, but they weren't. Finally, after a determined struggle, he discovered that the life he was living was fake.

So *Hashem* is always trying to wake us up in a gentle fashion by making us remember in our prayers, and through our holidays, that we don't

belong in foreign countries, no matter how idyllic life may seem to be in Truman Show of *galut*.

This Seder Night Teach Your Children the Truth

One of the central *mitzvot* of Seder night is to recount the story of the Exodus to our children, as the Torah commands: “*And you shall tell your son on that day, saying, It is because of this which the L-rd did for me when I went out of Egypt*” (Shemot, 13:8). To help us carry out the all-important *mitzvah* of passing on our heritage to our children, our Sages composed the *Haggadah*, which we joyously recite on *Pesach* night. We are commanded not only to relate to our children the wondrous events that G-d brought to pass in liberating us from bondage and making us His chosen Nation, but also to incorporate the lessons of the story into our lives.

What are the lessons of the story that we are to pass on to our children? Certainly, one of the messages is our faith in G-d. Another lesson is our role as His Chosen Nation, and our task to teach the world that He, and He alone, is the one G-d and King of the world. And we are also to teach our children that we can only carry out this Divine mission as a free People in *Eretz Yisrael*, as the Torah says: “*And He brought us out from there that He might bring us in to give us the Land which He swore to our* ^[SP2]^[SP3] ^[SP4]*forefathers*” (Devarim, 6:23).

We are to teach our children that the purpose of the Exodus was to bring us into the Land of Israel, the only place in the world where we can be a free independent Nation, as it says at the very beginning of the *Haggadah*: “This year we are here (in the exile of Brooklyn, Toronto, and Paris) – next year in the Land of Israel. This year we are slaves (in Brooklyn, Toronto, and Paris) – next year free men (in *Eretz Yisrael*.)”

On *Pesach night*, we are to teach our children that our real place is in the Land of Israel, the place where G-d wants us to be, and that the goal of living in Israel should be a pinnacle goal of our lives.

It is our duty as Jewish parents to make this clear to our children. Thus, it behooves the father of the family to explain:

“Children, because of the tragedy of the exile, I am here in Brooklyn, Toronto, Paris, Melbourne, or Mexico City. For 2000 years, the Jewish People longed to return to our Homeland, to the Land of Israel, but we lacked the means. Then, when G-d in His great kindness, established the State of Israel, and all Jews could finally return, my parents, your grandfather and grandmother, found it too difficult to pick up all of their belongings and immigrate to Israel, and they raised me as if I were an American, or Canadian, or Frenchmen, and that’s how I grew up. And that’s why, when I became of age, I believed that America or Canada or France was my home, and the thought of moving to Israel seemed so impractical, since I would have to learn Hebrew, and serve in the Israeli army, and start all over again in a new profession, and leave my parents behind, and now I’m stuck here in this gentile land, with a mortgage to pay, and your grandparents are getting older, so how can I leave them, and I am too old to find decent work in Israel so that I can afford send you kids to a top college and grad school. But I want you to know on this *Seder* night that the words and teachings of the *Haggadah* are true – America is not our real place. America is exile. G-d wants us to be in the Land of Israel. Only there can we be a free Nation. Only there can we truly be ourselves. Only there can we really keep the Torah. So you, my beloved children, while you are still young with all of your lives before you, before you become weighed down by

commitments and obligations and bills to pay, I want you to know that your real place is in the Land of Israel. Your mother and I want to encourage you to build your lives there. We want to help you realize the dream of 2000 years, so that the hope of “Next year in Jerusalem” will become a reality. Don’t worry about us. We will be fine. We will come to visit, and maybe one day, we, too, will make *aliyah*. But know without any doubt or question that as Jews your future is in the Land of Israel, and not here in exile. With G-d’s goodness, the time has come when all Jews can return to our Homeland, and if, because of whatever circumstances and reasons, your mother and I haven’t been able to merit the supreme blessing of carrying out the teachings of *Seder* night, by leaving the gentile land that we’re in to start a new, true Jewish life in Israel, we want you to do it. This year, make “Next year in Jerusalem” a reality. Go. Hop on a plane. There are excellent universities and grad schools in Israel. There’s a solid economy. The Israelis excel in all professions and fields. And we will be proud to have our son enlist in the Israeli army. Go. That’s where you belong. Go to Israel. Your grandfather and grandmother will be proud of you, along with your great grandparents and all the generations of our family who didn’t have the golden opportunity that is awaiting you. Build your lives in the Jewish Land and give your talents to the rebuilding of our Nation, as we have dreamed and prayed for 2000 years.”

This is what every parent should teach his children at the *Seder*. This is what every rabbi should teach his congregation. This is what every head of every Jewish organization should make as his number one priority, to let the Jews of America, and Canada, and France, all know that the time has come to abandon the exile, no matter how attractive it might seem,

and go to the Land of Israel. And if the elders are too ensconced to make a new beginning, they must rise up and tell their children to go in their stead, to break free from the chains of exile and foreign lands to become builders of the Jewish Nation in Israel, just like G-d commanded the Jews of old, and just as our Sages teach us on *Seder* night by leaving us with the message they don't want us to forget – “Next year in Jerusalem!”

The *Mitzvah* to Live in Israel

Just as every serious Jew exerts himself to pray three times a day, keep kosher, and guard the laws of family purity, he should certainly also strive to perform the all-encompassing *mitzvah* of living in *Eretz Yisrael*. True, packing up one's family and one's belongings, and moving to the Land of Israel is a *mitzvah* of gigantic proportions, dwarfing all other *mitzvot*, but the capability of raising ourselves to this exalted level of *Emunah* (faith in G-d) is our genetic heritage from our forefather, Avraham, who was commanded by G-d to leave his country, his homeland, and his father's house, and journey to the Holy Land, the only place on the globe where the Nation of Israel can fulfill its Divine mission of bringing the word of G-d to the world, as the Prophet Isaiah declares, "*For the Torah shall go forth from Zion, and the word of G-d from Jerusalem*" (Isaiah, 2:3).

Rabbi Kook taught that it was not an accident that when the Jews left Egypt, before entering the Land of Israel, they had to kill the King of Heshbone. The Hebrew word "*Heshbone*" means to make an accounting. Rabbi Kook said that in order for a Jew to come to Israel to live, he first must kill all of his accountings, deliberations, reasonings, and worries, whether about learning a new language, or making a living, or serving in the army, and simply come with a firm faith and belief in G-d.

When someone wrote Rabbi Kook, asking if it was a *mitzvah* to settle in Israel, Rabbi Kook answered, "I am amazed at the question. How can one possibly have a doubt about this fundamental principle? We plainly see throughout all of the Torah, the Prophets, and the Oral Torah, the

immeasurable devotion to *Eretz Yisrael*, to its settlement, its acquisition, and its building.” Rabbi Kook continued his lengthy 24-page response by citing hundreds of verses from the Torah, Scriptures, and the Talmud expressing the Jewish People's eternal bond and commitment to *Eretz Yisrael* (See, "Hazone HaGeula," Pgs. 10-34).

The Torah giant, the Ramban (Nachmonides) writes that the commandment to settle the Land of Israel is a positive *mitzvah*, one of the 613 commandments of the Torah. He explains that we are commanded with two duties: first, to possess the Land through conquest, and secondly, to dwell in the Land.

Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook would often explain that the Ramban clearly determines that conquering and living in the Land of Israel is the *milchemet mitzvah* of the Torah. This obligation continues in every generation, as the Ramban emphasizes three times in his "Supplement to the *Sefer HaMitzvot* of the Rambam," Positive Commandment #4:

"This is what our Sages called *milchemet mitzvah*... and don't err and say that this precept is the commandment to vanquish the seven nations...This isn't so...This Land is not to be left in their hands, or in the hands of any other nation, in any generation whatsoever."

"Behold we were commanded with conquest in every generation."

"This is a positive commandment which applies in every time."

The Ramban also emphasized that the commandments only reach their full value when performed in *Eretz Yisrael*, saying, "The essence of all of

the precepts is that they be performed in the Land of *Hashem*" (Ramban on the Torah, Vayikra, 18:25).

So central is the Land of Israel to the true and proper observance of the Torah that Jewish Law rules concerning a husband and wife living in the Diaspora, that if the wife wants to move to Israel and the husband does not, then the Jewish Court forces him to grant her a divorce and give her full divorce payment as set forth in their *Ketubah* marriage contract. If he wants to go on *aliyah* to *Eretz Yisrael* and she does not, then she must agree to a divorce with no *Ketubah* payment (Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer, 85:3).

In summary, as Rabbi Elazar Azkari writes in the "*Sefer Haredim*," "Every Jew must cherish the Land of Israel and flock to her with a great yearning from the far corners of the earth, as a child rushes to his mother's embrace, for our initial transgression, which caused us tears [SP5] of tribulation for generation upon generation, was in our rejecting the Land, as it says (of the Spies and the generation of the Wilderness), "*They despised the pleasant Land*" (Tehillim, 106:24).

May it be the will of the Almighty that all of our brothers and sisters still lingering in the lands of the exile will speedily hear the call of the Torah, the Prophets, and our holy Sages, and hurry home to our Holy Land.

Interview with Tzvi Fishman

One of the revelations found in the *Zohar* is the doctrine of reincarnation, a theme that appears in Tzvi Fishman's hilarious and poignant novel, "Fallen Angel," about an angel who is sent to Earth to warn a womanizing conman, bestselling author to change his immoral ways. From his days as a Hollywood screenwriter to the recent publication of his new book, "The Mouse Made Me Do It! – a Torah Guide to Kosher Surfing," author Tzvi Fishman has gone through several reincarnations in this lifetime alone, and also some incredible miracles. We spoke with him in his Jerusalem apartment, where he took time off from writing his INN Israel National News blog, "Hollywood to the Holy Land."



Hollywood Days

Behind him are bookshelves crammed with books on Torah. In the middle is a glossy, black-and-white photo of Fishman in his Hollywood days, looking like a sexy Tom Cruise, a far cry from the full-bearded Torah scholar sitting before me today. Fishman says he keeps it there to remind him that no matter how far he may sometimes fall in his service

of G-d, he is still light-years ahead of the tinsel town role he was playing in Hollywood.

INN

Your new work, "The Mouse Made Me Do It! – a Torah Guide to Kosher Surfing," is a deviation from your other books, where the principle, recurring theme is the importance of living in the Land of Israel. For instance, the hero of "The Discman and the Guru" comes to Israel. Also, in "Tevye in the Promised Land," your reincarnation of Tevye the Milkman from "Fiddler on the Roof," Tevye makes *aliyah* and builds a new life for his family in the Holy Land. The protagonists of both of your novelistic fables, "Heaven's Door" and "Fallen Angel," experience life-changing revelations in Israel; and certainly *Eretz Yisrael* is a main focus of the books you co-wrote with Rabbi David Samson about the teachings of Rabbi Kook. How does your recent book about beating Internet pornography fit in with this?

TZVI FISHMAN

"The Mouse Made Me Do It! – a Torah Guide to Kosher Surfing," isn't a deviation at all. It is a natural continuation of the other books. I learned the hard way that it isn't enough to live in the Land of Israel. We have to live here in a holy fashion. The foundation of the *Brit*, or Covenant, between G-d and Avraham is that the Jewish People guard their sexual lives in purity, as it says, "*And G-d said to Avraham, therefore thou shall safeguard my Brit, thou and thy seed after thee in their generations.*" This principle of *Shmirat HaBrit*, which means guarding the Covenant, is stressed in the Kabbalah over and over again. Rabbi Kook himself writes that safeguarding the holiness of our sexual lives must be the foundation of our rebirth and resettlement of the Land of Israel. The dangers of the Internet threaten this vital standard of holiness. The people of Israel (as well as everyone in the world) have to be given the

tools and guidance to overcome the ever-present temptations on the web. In my opinion, this is something that only the Torah can do.

INN

I always assumed that *Shmirat HaBrit* (guarding the laws of proper sexual behavior) was something particular to young people.

TZVI FISHMAN

The “*Zohar*,” the seminal treatise on which the Kabbalah is based, repeatedly emphasizes the importance of *Shmirat HaBrit* to married couples as well. The sanctity of the marital act has a direct influence on all the spiritual worlds, either opening or closing the channel of Divine blessing, for both the individual and the Jewish People as a whole. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, and all of the other masters of Kabbalah, assert that the majority of tragedies and hardships that we suffer stem from sexual transgression. In addition, the *Zohar* warns that the sanctity of the marital union has a direct influence on both the physical and spiritual wellbeing of our children. Let’s face it, with the pressures of modern living, and with the bombardment of pornography on the Internet, and the outbreak of immodest dress on our streets, it is easy to fall into sexual laxity. According to the secrets of Torah, the price we pay is dear.

INN

I would like to follow up on this subject a little later. But first, I thought we would do a little detective work to try and figure out what makes you write the books that you’ve authored. When your book, “The Discman and the Guru,” was published, you gave an interview to “*Arutz 7*” where you mentioned that your bar-*mitzvah* was held in a church. How did that happen?

TZVI FISHMAN

When I was growing up, my family belonged to a Reform Jewish

synagogue in New England. We went to *shul* on *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*, lit *Hanukah* candles, had a Christmas tree to be like the neighbors, ate *matzah* on *Seder* night and candy eggs on Easter. I remember the reform rabbi telling us in Hebrew School that the splitting of the Red Sea occurred, not through any miracle by G-d, but because a severe draught had caused the sea to dry up, and a freak, sudden rainstorm brought a flood that luckily drowned the Egyptians after the Jews had crossed on dry land. His explanation sounded so ludicrous to me, I didn't want to even bother with having a *bar-mitzvah*. But my parents insisted. Since, the congregation had outgrown our old temple, and the new one was still under construction, my *bar-mitzvah* ceremony was held in a Unitarian church. To me, it is a perfect symbol for being a Jew in America, where you are totally immersed in a foreign, gentile culture. Growing up Jewish in America is like growing up in a church.

INN

The tape is recording, so don't wait for my questions. I know you have told your *baal t'shuva* story dozens of times to high-school students all over the country, so don't wait for my leads.

TZVI FISHMAN

After that, I went to a very prestigious private school in Massachusetts. Out of the 800 students, there were only a handful of Jews. We had to pray on Sundays in the basement of the campus church. Upstairs in this gigantic, impressive cathedral, the rest of the students and the faculty were gathered in prayer, and we were stuck out of sight in the basement, like we belonged to some low-rate religion. That's how I related to Judaism also. I didn't want to have anything to do with it.

INN

The world is reading your every word.

TZVI FISHMAN

Most of my graduating class was accepted into universities like Harvard, Yale, Stanford, and Princeton. I decided to go to NYU Film School where I spent four years in the dark, watching hundreds of movies. The year after I graduated, I wrote a screenplay that became a Hollywood movie, called "Law and Disorder," starring Carroll O'Connor and Ernest Borgnine. I also sold a novel to a top New York publisher. I was sure that I was on my way to attain my dream of becoming "The Great American Novelist." Watch out Norman Mailer and Philip Roth! Here comes Fishman!

INN

I am sure you have lots of entertaining stories from this period, but how about telling us a few things that affected your Jewish worldview?

TZVI FISHMAN

Ever since my bar *mitzvah*, I abandoned G-d and Judaism completely. As you can see from my old publicity photo, I was trying to look as American and gentile as John Travolta. But there were indeed some weird events, as if G-d were trying to remind me who I really was, even in my darkest moments. For instance, the summer before my novel hit the bookstores, I decided to make a literary pilgrimage to Europe, in the footsteps of the famous American writers, Henry Miller, Thomas Wolfe, and Ernest Hemingway before me. I crossed the Atlantic by ocean liner and disembarked at the French port of Cherbourg. Remember, in those days I looked like that picture, clean shaven, with the long hair of a hippie, and without this giant beard. A Mercedes drove by as I was hiking with my backpack toward the city, and the driver yelled out, "Heil Hitler!" They were the first words I heard in Europe. It was freaky.

INN

If I am not mistaken, that scene found its way into your novel, "The Discman and the Guru."

TZVI FISHMAN

A good novelist writes about what he knows. Anyway, when I got back to America, my novel had been published. So I went to the publisher's publicity department and suggested they send my picture to TV talk shows. After all, I was a good-looking guy. They agreed to try a campaign with the State of Florida. Sure enough, five talk-show producers phoned back to book me on their shows. But when I flew down to Florida, I couldn't find my book in the bookstores. Furious, I appeared on the talk shows and revealed all the smut I knew about the publishing company. The talk-show hosts loved it, but back in New York, my editor was aghast. He phoned me frantically to apologize and beg me to stop, but I was angry about their screw up. At that time, the success of my book was the most important thing to me in the world. When I got back to New York, he summoned me for a meeting in his plush, skyscraper office. When I demanded to know what had happened, he answered, "The problem is your name." I didn't understand what he was hinting at. My name? Fishman? What was the matter with my name? Then the light dawned on me. "You mean because I am a Jew," I asked incredulously. I mean, this was America, not Europe – the land of George Washington and the cherry tree. "That's right," he admitted. "Look," he confessed. "My name isn't Higgins, it is Cohen, but I changed it to get a job here. I bought your book because I liked it, but this company hates Jews."

INN

That's really something.

TZVI FISHMAN

Not long afterward, the movie that I wrote was released with an all-star cast. The producer called me in and asked what kind of film I wanted to write next? I told him that I had read a great book about the Holocaust, a bestseller at the time, filled with action, courage, and romance. He

rejected the idea, saying, "I'm not going to make a movie whose hero is a Jew." Even though my Jewishness wasn't a big part of my life, I felt like he had spit in my face. But I was determined to make it as a writer, so I wiped off the spit and moved out to Hollywood.

INN

Los Angeles is known as the city of Lost Angels.

TZVI FISHMAN

That's what it was for me. In a short time, I sold two more original screenplays that were made into films. I had money, a cool apartment by the beach, a sexy sports car, a membership at a health club filled with beautiful California girls – in short the American Dream. In the morning, I used to play racket ball with the great basketball player, Wilt Chamberlain, and workout in the weight room with Arnold Schwarzenegger, who was just starting his movie career. After slimnastics class with Susie, Wendy, Cindy, Sally, and Jane, I'd spend the afternoon at the beach, working on my tan. Nights were spent prowling the discos, may the Almighty forgive me. When in Rome do as the Romans do. But the truth is that I was not particularly happy. With each new conquest and success, I felt that something was missing. I thought maybe if I sold a script for more money, or bought a fancier car, then I would be happy. But it didn't help. Each new acquisition left me feeling empty. Now I know the reason for my darkness – even though I was wallowing in physical pleasures, I wasn't giving any nourishment to my soul. Then I became physically ill.

INN

If I remember correctly, you developed some kind of ulcerative colitis.

TZVI FISHMAN

That's what the doctors called it. I would have to race to the bathroom with a diarrhea attack twenty times a day, and only blood would pour

out. It blew my mind completely. Here I was, rocketing up the ladder of success in Hollywood, and I had to spend half my day in the bathroom. I had to take large doses of cortisone, which blew up my face like a beach ball. Seeing myself in the mirrors of the health club, I didn't recognize the monster staring back. Try making a pass at a UCLA cheerleader when you have a face like Quasimodo. After a month, the cortisone dried up the bleeding, but the minute I got off the drug, the bleeding returned, more furious than before. After a year of being sick, I started to see a shrink, figuring I must be screwed up. I didn't realize that it was America that was screwed up, and that I simply didn't belong there, a holy Jewish soul trying to keep up with the *goyim* and all of their unholy ways. Years later, when I met the Kabbalist elder, Rabbi Eliahu Leon Levi in Israel, he explained that the bleeding stemmed from the immoral life I was living. The *Zohar* compares sexual transgression and the wasting of semen to the spilling of blood. I was being punished measure for measure. At that time, I hadn't heard about Rabbi Akiva, and I didn't realize that my bleeding was all for the best – a Heavenly wake-up call, so to speak, warning me that I was on a glamorous track to hell. For almost another year, even though I was bleeding my guts out, I kept on living my same sordid Hollywood life.

INN

One second please. According to Rabbi Levi's explanation, there are a lot of people, who aren't exactly living holy lives, who should be walking around with ulcerative colitis.

TZVI FISHMAN

Everyone has his own timetable and his own rectification-*tikun*. The Almighty is patient and keeps a low profile, waiting for a person to wake up and do *t'shuva*. If he doesn't, it's just a matter of time till the blow is delivered. At first, it comes as a gentle pat on the back. If the person doesn't get the hint, then the warning becomes stronger. It may

take the form of financial problems, or a marriage on the rocks, or a child getting sick, G-d forbid. If someone has abandoned G-d completely, the worst punishment of all can be that G-d abandons him in turn and lets him live out his life in ignorant bliss, saving his punishment for the fires of hell and a reincarnation as a dog. I know people don't like to think of these things, but our holy writings are filled with frightening descriptions of what happens to people who continue stubbornly onward like mules.

INN

It sounds scary, especially to think that every dog you see on the street is some poor guy who made some mistakes in his life.

[Fishman smiles. His eyes crinkle, and his face lights up like a 250 watt light bulb. It is hard to believe that this holy, very Orthodox-looking Jew is a former Hollywood screenwriter.]

TZVI FISHMAN

After two years, when the medicine failed to cure me, I started out on a spiritual quest. I tried everything. Health food, macrobiotics, holistic massage, yoga, I Ching, acupuncture, gestalt, Tarot cards, not to mention a variety of mind-expanding drugs. One day, I was sitting on the beach when a friend asked me why I didn't know anything about Judaism? The question hit me like a sledgehammer. I had studied world history. I had read Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Kant, Voltaire, Nietzsche, and Thoreau. I had studied the sciences, the arts, literature, and had checked out books about Christianity, Zen Buddhism, Hinduism, and the like. But I knew absolutely nothing about Judaism. Ever since the reform rabbi's preposterous explanation of the splitting of the sea, I never thought to open any Jewish text. During my shrink period, I had read dozens of books about psychology, and I had studied enough Sigmund Freud to know that if you avoid something close to you, that means you have a psychological block, a deep inner fear which

paralyzes you from discovering who you really are. My friend, Daniel Dayan, happened to be an Israeli. He was born in Morocco, to a religious family. They moved to Israel when he was nine. After seeing his first Charlie Chaplin film, he was hooked. When he finished his Israel Army service, he set off to America to become an actor. Today, he has a beard longer than mine. He lives in Safed, studies Torah all through the night in the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, and organizes the Breslov community's Rosh HaShanah extravaganza in Uman. But way back then, he was just another screwed-up Jew like me, trying to make it big in Hollywood. Except he still had his childhood love and respect for the Torah.

INN

Your description rings a bell. Did your friend play the role of the rabbi in the Shuli Rand film, "Ushpizin?"

TZVI FISHMAN

That's him. After I moved to Israel, he became a *baal t'shuva*, too, and moved back to Israel as well. He was the one who influenced the actor, Shuli Rand, to start a new life of Torah.

INN

Why don't the three of you do a film together?

TZVI FISHMAN

We are waiting for *Arutz 7* to go into the film business.

INN

Good idea. But let's get back to the beach.

TZVI FISHMAN

His question blew my mind. The same day I bought a Bible and started to read: "*In the beginning, G-d created the heaven and the earth.*" When I read those words, my gaze shot up to the sky. "Oh, no!" I

thought. "G-d really exists, and I haven't paid any attention to Him since my bar *mitzvah*." I kept turning pages as if I were reading the screenplay of an action adventure. G-d tells Avraham to go to the Land of Israel. Then He tells Moshe to free the Jews and take them to the Land of Israel. Over and over again, G-d tells the Jews that He has given them the commandments of the Torah to do them in the Land of Israel. The Land of Israel, the Land of Israel, over and over again. At the time, I knew nothing about *Eretz Yisrael*. Sure, I had probably heard about the Yom Kippur War, but as a super-assimilated Jew, Israel was simply not a part of my *weltanschauung*. Yet, according to the simple, straightforward reading of the Bible, it was clear that G-d wanted His People to live in the Land of Israel, and not in Los Angeles or New York.

INN

What happened then?

TZVI FISHMAN

I bought a book about the foundations of Judaism. *Rosh HaShanah* was coming, and I read about the custom of *Tashlich*. So, on Rosh HaShana day, I walked down to the beach and threw my cortisone pills into the Pacific Ocean. "Please G-d," I begged. "Accept these pills as my sins and please heal me without any more medicine."

INN

Wow! That was quite a drastic step, throwing your cortisone into the ocean.

TZVI FISHMAN

I had tried everything else, and I was convinced that my separation from G-d was the source of my problems. But without the medicine, I became sicker and sicker. I started bleeding profusely. Within a short time, I lost twenty pounds. Finally, I had to be hospitalized.

INN

Back to the cortisone.

TZVI FISHMAN

That's right. At least for the ten days that I was in the hospital. The minute I got out, I stopped once again. I figured that by relying on the cortisone, I would never get down to the source of the problem. Once again, I started to bleed. One evening, I became really scared, thinking that if I kept up this insanity, either I would bleed to death, or I would have to have my colon surgically removed. That night I had a dream. I was in a second-hand clothes shop, looking at old clothes when I spotted a door to another room. Curious, I stepped inside. The inner room was filled with books in Hebrew, four walls of bookshelves stacked with holy Jewish texts, like the study hall of a yeshiva. I couldn't read Hebrew at that time, but I was filled with a profound sense of peace and inner calm. I just wanted to stand there and soak in the holiness of the books. But the shop owner appeared and said he wanted to close the store. I begged him to let me stay another five minutes, just to stand there and look at the books. Grudgingly, he agreed. That's when I saw another door to yet another inner room. Venturing forward, I stepped inside. The room was empty except for a huge black box in the center of the floor. It was a giant *tefillin*, looking like some gigantic oversized prop in a Woody Allen movie. Gazing at it, my heart swelled with love. Man how I wanted that *tefillin*. Suddenly, I heard a tremendous thunderous Voice From Above, like a Voice out of Sinai, proclaiming, "THIS IS THE ANSWER! YOU HAVE TO ATTACH YOURSELF TO G-D!" I woke up, startled. My heart was pounding. The Voice still rang in my ears. It was the clearest, truest, most real experience I had ever heard in my life.

INN

You know your dream is amazingly similar to the dream of the King at

the beginning of the book, "The Kuzari." In his dream, an angel appears and tells him that his desire to get close to G-d is pleasing, but that his actions are not the right actions. That's the catalyst that sets the King off on a quest to find the actions pleasing to G-d, which turn out to be the commandments of the Torah.

TZVI FISHMAN

I see you've done your homework. That similarity is one of the reasons I wrote "The Kuzari For Young Readers." But way back then in Hollywood, I had never heard of "The Kuzari," and I was still a long way off from making a commitment to Torah. I was so shaken up by the dream that the next morning, I went to an Orthodox shul and asked the rabbi to show me how to put on *tefillin*. He happily agreed and told me to say the *Shema Yisrael* prayer, which I still remembered from Hebrew School. But even though I would return to the synagogue every morning to put on *tefillin*, I was still bleeding profusely. Finally, I decided that I had to continue taking the cortisone. That very same morning, my uncle phoned, asking if I could drive him to the hospital. He had to have laser surgery on a cataract, so he needed someone to drive him home afterward. Since my aunt was a doctor, I asked him if she could write me out a prescription for the cortisone, because I wanted to avoid the tortuous medieval examinations I always had to suffer whenever I went to the gastroenterologist. When I met him later that morning, he handed me the prescription. At the hospital, all during his treatment, I stood outside the operating room and prayed the same mantra over and over, "G-d, please heal my uncle. G-d, please heal my uncle." For forty-five minutes straight. When I returned to my apartment, I headed straight to the bathroom, as was my usual custom. But this time, there was no bleeding! The blood had vanished. Disappeared! No more! I felt like G-d had reached out a finger, touched my belly, and healed my colitis. I was astounded.

INN

Our Sages teach that when you pray for someone else, you are answered first. We learn that from the story of Avraham and Avimelech.

TZVI FISHMAN

I didn't know that back then. I was absolutely dumbstruck by the miracle. "Am I hypnotizing myself with all of this religion business?" I thought. But the bleeding didn't return. No doctor has ever been able to explain it. The cortisone had always taken ten days to turn off the bleeding, and here the bleeding stopped without taking cortisone at all.

INN

That certainly isn't an everyday event.

TZVI FISHMAN

That's putting it mildly. I was blown away. How could I continue on with my bohemian life of beaches and Hollywood discos after that? The next night, after not having bled the whole day, I prayed a heartfelt bedtime prayer. "Dear G-d," I said. "I don't know why You have come into my life and done this great miracle for me. But I am certainly grateful, and I would like to make You happy some way in return. Tell me what You want me to do, and I will do it. When I read the Bible, it seems clear that You want the Jewish People to live in the Land of Israel. So if You want me to go there, give me some kind of sign and I will go. If You want me to stay here in Hollywood, I'll do that too. Maybe I can write Jewish movies, or get a job at some Jewish newspaper. Just give me a sign from Heaven, and I'll do it."

INN

You've got me at the edge of my chair.

TZVI FISHMAN

The very next morning, when I was leaving my apartment, I noticed that I had mail in my mailbox. It turned out to be a large travel brochure. On the cover was a big picture of the Western Wall. The caption read: "JERUSALEM, MY CHOSEN." I got goose pimples all over my body. The very morning after I asked G-d for a sign whether to go to Israel or not, I find this travel brochure in my mailbox! Never in my life had I ever received any kind of Jewish mail from any kind of Jewish organization. Remember, I was totally assimilated. Once again, my head started spinning in circles. "There is a director greater than Steven Spielberg," I thought. Not only had G-d answered my prayer for a sign, He had obviously known in advance that I would make such a request, because He had to arrange that someone would mail me the brochure, so that it would arrive in my mailbox the very morning after my prayer!

INN

Are you sure this is something that really happened, and not one of your imaginative short stories?

TZVI FISHMAN

That very day, I purchased a ticket to Israel. Before going, I decided to visit my parents for a week, since who knew how long I was going to be in Israel? The first morning at home, my Dad called from work, saying that he bumped into an old friend of mine who wanted to see me. So I drove over to the bookstore where the guy worked. As I am talking to him about my upcoming trip to Israel, a very attractive woman enters the store and starts browsing up and down the aisles. "That's a coincidence," he says. "She's an Israeli." She came to the cash register, holding a book on Kabbalah. When my friend introduced us, her face lit up, ecstatic to meet the writer of the popular novel that everyone in my hometown was talking about. Nationwide, sales had been disappointing, but in my hometown everyone had read it, certain that

the novel's characters and scandalous intrigues were based on the people of our town. When my friend told her that I was on my way to Israel, she invited me to her apartment, saying she would give me the names of a lot of influential people. She said her divorced husband was a TV celebrity who knew everyone in Israel. When we arrived at her pad, she excused herself, saying she wanted to change into something more comfortable. "Uh oh," I thought. At that time, I hadn't learned about Yosef and Potifar's wife, so I had to resist on my own. It was another miracle that I didn't succumb to her charms. I was rewarded with a long list of names of people in Israel, one being an old lady in Jerusalem, an incredibly holy *tzaddekis*, like a prophetess out of the past, who let me stay at her home, as if I were part of the family. Every morning, she would wake me at five and push me out the door, *tefillin* in hand, to pray at the *Kotel*.

INN

This interview is getting pretty long, and if I weren't the editor, my editor would kill me. So that's when you made *aliyah*?

TZVI FISHMAN

No. On that first visit, I traveled all over the country trying to find G-d. I prayed at the gravesites of all of the *tzaddikim* and holy rabbis of the past, dunked myself in the *Arizal's* holy mountain-spring *mikvah* again and again, and hung out for hours at the *Kotel* whenever I was in Jerusalem. A lot of times, Rabbi Schuster would approach me and ask if I wanted to learn in yeshiva, but I always said no. In my mind, going to yeshiva was like going back two hundred years to the ghettos of Poland. I didn't want to learn Torah. I wanted to find G-d. See what a knucklehead I was! One thing was certain. I knew I had to make Israel my home. Everything here was Jewish. The language, the street signs, the food, the bus drivers, the soldiers, the cities, the Biblical mountains of old. For someone who wanted a true Jewish life, *Eretz Yisrael*, and

not Los Angeles or New York, was obviously the place to be. As Tevya would say, to make a long story short, one day, a rabbi whom I had befriended grabbed me by the collar and took me to a Zionist yeshiva called *Machon Meir*. He sat me down in the *beit midrash*, and we started to learn, surrounded by enthusiastic young people wearing colorful, knitted *kippot* and speaking Hebrew with Israeli, English, French, Ethiopian, and Russian accents - Jews from all over the world. Suddenly, flanked by shelves of Mishna, Talmud, and tomes of Jewish Law, I experienced the same feeling of serenity and wholeness that I had felt in my dream of the room filled with holy books. Suddenly, I was overwhelmed with a feeling of the presence of G-d. His light filled the yeshiva. It radiated out of the books. It shone from the happy faces of the students. From that moment on, I was hooked.

INN

That was it? Goodbye America?

TZVI FISHMAN

Not quite. After a few months of bliss, catching up on all the learning I had avoided, my parents phoned from America, insisting I come home for a big party celebrating their fortieth wedding anniversary. For two weeks, I debated whether or not to go. On one hand, honoring one's parents is a huge *mitzvah*. But so is learning Torah in Israel. Finally, I decided to make my parents happy. When the plane landed at JFK, on the way to pick up my luggage, I felt I had to go to the bathroom. Believe it or not, my bowels burst open and a raging flood of blood poured out. "Oh no!" I shuddered. "Why did I come back to America?" It was a clear sign to me that G-d wanted me to know, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that America wasn't for me. That's the moment I realized in the depths of my soul that the one and only healthy place for a Jew, physically, mentally, and spiritually, was in Israel. When I saw my parents, I told them that I was returning to Jerusalem immediately

after their party. The next day, when I came home from doing some errands, I found a note on the kitchen table from my father saying that my mother had felt pains in her heart, and that he had rushed her to the hospital. When I reached the emergency room, a doctor came out and said, "Do you know what you are doing to your mother?" I was floored. "She is miserable that you are moving to Israel," he declared. "What can I do?" I responded. "I have my own life to live." He looked at me sternly, then grinned. "Don't worry," he said. "Your mother will be fine. It's just palpitations. The truth is, I once wanted to move to Israel. But my mother was against it, and I didn't have the backbone to stand up to her. So if you have the desire and courage to go, then go. Your mother will be all right."

INN

If I remember correctly, your parents eventually moved to Israel, too.

TZVI FISHMAN

That's right. Some fifteen years later, when it became difficult for them to get by on their own, I went to Florida, packed up their bags, and took them home with me to Israel. That's the starting point of my new novel, "Dad."

INN

Now I understand why you write so much about *aliyah*. But to sum up, I'd like to get back to my original question. What brought you to write a book about Torah, Kabbalah, and Sex?

TZVI FISHMAN

You are putting me on the spot. The truth is, even though the Land of Israel is the ultimate stop for a Jew, the journey doesn't end there. In fact, coming home to Israel is just the beginning. Just like with our

forefathers, everyone has his share of trials and tests that G-d sends to bring us higher and higher in His service. In my case, I slipped a disc and walked around in pain for months. After meeting the Kabbalist, Rabbi Eliahu Leon Levi, I had an amazing revelation. Slipped discs, like colitis, and a lot of other ailments, are G-d's way of calling us back to Him. In my case, I suddenly realized that I had been lax in obtaining the level of holiness that a Jew is required to maintain in his sexual life. With a dazzling clarity, the pieces of my life puzzle fell into place. Like I said – it isn't enough just to live in the Holy Land. We have to live here in a holy fashion. And that also holds true for all of the Jews still in Hollywood and New York. Wherever he is, a Jew is bound by a higher Divine standard.

INN

I guess like you said, a good writer writes about what he knows. But I have heard people say that the safeguards mentioned in your book, "The Mouse Made Me Do It!" fall into the category of Kabbalistic stringencies. Are you sure your new book is for everyone?

TZVI FISHMAN

A Jew isn't just someone who eats bagels, gefilte fish, or felafal. Whether he acknowledges it or not, a Jew is a unique holy being, blessed with a Divine code of living. Ever since G-d made His covenant with Avraham, the Jewish People have been called upon to guard the sanctity of their sexual life. It turns out that not everything you see on the Internet is kosher for a Jew. The point is, when it comes to sex, because of the great *yetzer* and passions involved, there are many sound rules that are often overlooked, and this is where a lot of our troubles begin – both for the individual and for the Jewish Nation as a whole.

INN

There is a philosophy that maintains that precisely because the sexual

urge is so hard to control, that it is best not to speak openly about these matters, lest a person be brought to depression and despair when he realizes the gravity of his mistakes.

TZVI FISHMAN

Do you let a guy fall off a cliff, or do you yell out to save him? It's the same thing with writing about *aliyah* and the dangers of Jewish life in the Diaspora. It isn't knowledge that brings people to their downfall, but rather the lack of it. When people learn that there is a better way, and a path to a happier, holier existence, they discover a new joy in their lives. The holiness of our sexual lives, more than anything else, distinguishes our holy calling as Jews. G-d didn't bring us back to the Holy Land for us to create another Hollywood, or to turn Disengoff Street into Sunset Strip. With G-d's help and kindness, we have come back and rebuilt our Promised Land. Now is the time to infuse it with more and more holiness. G-d willing, that is what the book, "The Mouse Made Me Do It!" and our website: jewishsexuality.com are all about.

INN

Anyone who has read your INN blog "Hollywood to the Holy Land" can't help but notice that you are pushing readers to your Jewish Sexuality website. Some people say the Internet is too open a forum for these intimate matters.

TZVI FISHMAN

Today, the pornography on the Internet is our number one spiritual enemy, and it is important that guidelines of Torah be out there, so people have the ammunition to defend themselves.

INN

Do you really think that swatting away with your pen at the windmills of porn in the world will really have a lasting effect?

TZVI FISHMAN

We receive a lot of thank-you emails from people who have discovered a holier way of living after a visit to the website. As our Sages say, if you save one Jew, it is like you have saved the whole world. Anyway, it certainly beats writing trash movies in Hollywood.

It's Time to Come Home

One of the classic *halachic* treatises on the settlement of *Eretz Yisrael*, "*Eim HaBanim Semeichah*," was written by Rabbi Yisachar Shlomo Teichtal, may *Hashem* revenge his blood, an Ultra-Orthodox Torah authority who was murdered by the Nazis. Rabbi Teichtal was vehemently anti-Zionist at the beginning of the war, but changed his thinking completely as the Nazi horror gained momentum throughout Europe. The book, as I noted in the past, is surely one of the most important Torah treasures of our times, and must-reading for all serious Jews.

Since we are reading the Torah portion, "*Shelach Lecha*," this *Shabbat* in *shul*, we would like to address our misguided brethren, the talkbackers who write against the *mitzvah* of *aliyah*, and who prefer to bastion themselves in foreign lands in their *glatt* kosher castles, rather than dirty their sparkingly shined Florsheims with Holy Land mud. Rabbi Teichtal has this to say about the sin of the Spies in the wilderness, who brought back a negative report about the Land of Israel, discouraging their fellow Jews from continuing on their journey to the Promised Land:

"Furthermore, my brother, know that in order to rectify our ancestors' sin, everything must be exactly as it was then. At that time, the leaders of the congregation spread evil propaganda against *Eretz Yisrael*. Therefore today, as well, the leaders of the congregation must propagandize for the sake of *Eretz Yisrael* in order to pay off their "bad debt." They must be the first ones to open the nation's eyes. They must explain that there is no reason for us to remain in the foreign, impure,

and polluted atmosphere of the Diaspora, nor to expend our energies in vain while the gentiles rob the fruits of our labor from before our very eyes. The leaders must speak to the people in this fashion and arouse within them a fire and a spark of love for our desirable Land. This alone will make us worthy of Redemption.

"This follows the words of our mentor, the *Or HaChaim*. He writes that Israel's leaders throughout the generations will be held responsible for the fact that we are still in exile, because they should have inspired the Jews to love *Eretz Yisrael*. The leaders of the generation must inspire the Jewish People to help bring the Redemption closer by using the natural means that G-d has prepared for us. We are not worthy enough for it to occur with manifest miracles, rather only with miracles disguised in seemingly natural events, as in the days of Cyrus."

"I know that the humble ones who separate themselves from the building effort do so for the sake of Heaven. They fear that they and their children may be harmed by joining people whose ways have strayed from the path of the Torah. Behold, we can say about such people that although their intentions are acceptable, their actions are not, for many reasons. First of all, the prophet Isaiah said to King Hezekiah, '*Do as you are commanded! Why do you involve yourself with the Merciful One's hidden matters?*' The same applies here. All Jews must be united in order to fulfill the positive commandment of the Torah of building and settling the Land. This cannot be accomplished individually. Therefore, do as you are commanded! Further, no harm will come to a Jew who participates in this great and exceedingly lofty *mitzvah*. On the contrary, if a large number of Orthodox Jews join in, they will enhance the sanctity of the Land, as I previously cited in the

name of the holy *Rebbe* of Gur and the Ramban. Since we are commanded to build the Land and raise it from the dust, it is forbidden to be overly pious and undermine this endeavor, G-d forbid. Rather, we must build with whoever it may be and concentrate on enhancing the sanctity of the Land. Then *Hashem* will assist us.

"I have already cited our great and holy Rabbis who say that the light of *Mashiach* will shine when we build and cherish the Land. We must do precisely this and completely ignore the claims of today's 'pious ones.' We must cherish our Holy Land and sacrifice ourselves for it. This way, we will cause the light of *Mashiach* to shine forth, with G-d's help, speedily in our days. Amen.

"In summation, anyone who has a brain in his head and truly believes in *Hashem* and His Land will let no claim in the world stop him from elevating the pride of our Land. The arguments of those who try to prevent people from building the Land are the arguments of Satan and his associates, may the Merciful One protect us from their viewpoints. This is even more true today after all that we have been through. Where are all of the Torah centers of Poland, Lithuania, and Hungary? Do we still have a portion and an inheritance here? Are we not considered strangers by the inhabitants of these lands? They have devoured our money, our bodies, and our spirituality. Thus, any intelligent and G-d fearing person will realize that there is nothing more to search for here in exile. The time has come for all of us to return to the possession of our forefathers. This is true and clear in accordance with the truth of the Torah, and anyone who denies it denies the truth and the Torah."

You Owe It to Your Kids

I don't mean to be rude. If you were to meet me in-person, you would probably say that I am a very nice guy. But there are certain things that are so antithetical to common sense and healthy Jewish thought that a blogger has to speak out.

Can anyone imagine a Puerto Rican kid not speaking Spanish? Or a Japanese kid not speaking Japanese? Of course not. This is the natural, healthy, common-sense order of life.

But when it comes to the Diaspora, something gets very screwed up. You would think that, like in the above examples, every Jewish kid should know how to speak Hebrew. Just the way Spanish is the language of Puerto Ricans, and Japanese is the language of the Japanese, Hebrew is the language of the Jews.

Nothing could be simpler, right?

That's the way it is in Israel. That's the way it should be. Jewish children in the Holy Land grow up speaking Hebrew. They also may know Yiddish, or English, or French, but they all speak Hebrew fluently.

But in the Diaspora, things get confused. In the Diaspora, there are millions of Jews who don't know Hebrew at all! Instead of speaking their own language, they speak an assortment of foreign tongues that are totally alien to their souls.

This alone should make everyone realize how mind-warping Diaspora life is for a Jew.

In the *"Shema Yisrael"* prayer, we say, *"And you shall teach them to your children, to speak of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you walkest by the way, and when you lie down and rise up"* (Devarim, 11:19). Rashi explains this verse by saying: "When the infant begins to speak, his father should speak with him in the Holy Tongue and teach him Torah, for if he doesn't, behold, it is like he buries him, as it says, *'And teach them to your children to speak of them.'*"

Rashi is coming to tell us that if a father speaks to his child in a foreign language, it is as much as burying him in a foreign culture, alien to Jewish thinking, Jewish values, Jewish concepts, Jewish understandings, and Jewish traditions. If a Jewish child grows up with a foreign language as his main tongue, he will come to have a foreign identity, a distorted understanding of who he is, a *goyisha kop*, so-to-speak, meaning he will think like the gentiles around him and approach Torah learning with the headset of a foreign mentality. Rashi says that if you don't speak to your child in Hebrew, you will lead him astray from his true heritage as a Jew.

Thank G-d, in Israel, this tragedy is being healed. Immigrants come to the Holy Land from Russia, Morocco, America, Argentina, and a dozen other countries, all speaking foreign languages, and presto! Their children grow up speaking Hebrew! The way it should be. The way G-d intended Jews to speak. It's a miracle!

So if you don't know Hebrew yet, start learning. It's your language. It's who you are. It may say on your passport that you are a Canadian, or Frenchman, or Englishman, or American, but that's only a piece a

paper. You are really a Jew. So, start speaking Hebrew and be who you really are. Why live a life imitating others when you can be yourself?

You owe it to your kids.

Memorial Day

For me, the most poignant event of this year's Israel Independence Day was attending the memorial ceremony at my sons' *Talmud Torah* religious grade school. Two of my boys, along with a large cast of other 10-12 year-olds, told stories about brave Israeli soldiers who had fallen defending our cherished homeland, the greatest sacrifice and sanctification of G-d that a Jew can make. Others acted out the famous battle of Givat HaTachmoshet, one of the decisive battles of the Six Day War. After the profoundly moving two-minute long siren that is sounded all over the country, the children paraded with Israeli flags around the auditorium in tune to the rousing Israeli melodies of the school band.

"Thank you, G-d," I said quietly. "Thank you for taking me out of America. Thank you for making me realize that George Washington isn't my real forefather, and that the Boston Tea Party has nothing to do with my past. Thank you G-d for bringing me to the Land of the Jews and teaching me the true meaning of Torah, which isn't just performing individual precepts, like *kashrut* and *Shabbos*, but also helping to build the Holy Jewish Nation in its Holy Land. Thank you for giving me healthy, wonderful children who are all growing up as Jews through and through, celebrating Israel's Memorial and Independence Days, and not someone else's."

Only an *oleh* who lives in Israel can appreciate the incredible difference between religious kids who grow up in Israel and their Diaspora counterparts. My children are a different species of child, a totally different breed. Sure they like candy and Coke and playing basketball

like all children, but their heads are in a completely different place. The wars they learn about are Jewish wars. Their war heroes are Israeli. Their flag is the Star and David – not the Stars and Stripes of someone else's country. Their songs of patriotism are Israeli. They celebrate Israel's independence and not the Fourth of July. The history they learn is the history of Abraham, Moses, Joshua, and King David, Rabbi Akiva and the Macabbees. Instead of growing up being American kids who are Jewish, they are Children of Israel, just as we are called in the Bible.

Here in Israel, I meet a lot of wonderful, young Jewish Americans who come for a year of study. No matter what religious group they belong to, or how many years they've been in yeshiva, their heads are in America. Religious-wise they are all good, well-meaning Jews, but their heads have been grafted with all of the history and folklore of America, from Betsy Ross to the Vietnam War and jokes about Obama. "Oh cool, oh colossal, oh what a freak out, hee hee hee!" you hear them say on buses, while Israeli kids their age are going into the army or some other meaningful national service.

Thank G-d my kids are growing up in Israel. Thank G-d for opening my eyes that being Jewish means being absorbed in Jewish history, and celebrating Jewish independence, and living in the Jewish Land, and performing the *mitzvot* in the place they were meant to be performed. Thank you G-d for actualizing the goal of our prayers in bringing me home to live a life of Torah in the Land you gave to my forefathers, as we pray every day, three times a day, in the *Amidah* prayer, "*Sound the great shofar of our freedom; lift up the banner to bring our exiles together, and gather us from the four corners of the earth.*"

The True *Hasidim*

I was planning on going to the *Kotel* this afternoon for the mass prayer on behalf of our soldiers fighting in Aza, but suddenly, I have two funerals to attend. The father of fallen soldier, Yonatan Netanel, z'tzl, is a friend from the neighborhood, and a teacher of two of my sons during their years in *Talmud Torah*. The father of fallen soldier, Dr. Dagan Wertman, z'tzl, is a neurologist that treated my parents.

The word "*Hasid*" means a righteous and saintly person, who is fervent in the proper and joyful performance of the Torah's commandments. Often, when you hear the word "*Hasid*," you picture a devoted Jew dressed in black clothes, a follower of Rabbi Nachman, or *Chabad*. But the original meaning of the word is much different, as King David describes in a Psalm which we recite every day:

"Let the Hasidim be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud upon their beds at night. The exalted praises of Hashem are in their mouth, and a double-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance upon the nations, chastisements upon the peoples, to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute upon them the written judgment - this is the honor of His Hasidim. Halleluya." (Psalms 147)

The soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces, who are risking their lives for the honor of G-d and the Jewish People, they are the true *Hasidim*. May the Almighty fight alongside them until the enemy is utterly crushed.

We Have Come Home!

On Israel Independence Day, just two weeks before the Six-Day War, HaRav Tzvi Yehuda Hakohen Kook stood up in the study hall of the *Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva* and gave an unforgettable speech. Several weeks later, after all of the miraculous events which brought Jerusalem and the Biblical lands of Judea and Samaria back into our hands, students remembered with wonder all of the prophetic words which the Rabbi had spoken.

This blog is excerpted from the book, "*Torat Eretz Yisrael*," which I had the honor of writing with the esteemed Rabbi David Samson, based on the teachings of *HaRav* Tzvi Yehuda Kook. Hopefully, with G-d's help, people will soon be able to purchase the book online. Certainly, it is one of the most important Jewish books of our time in setting forth Rabbi Kook's profound Torah understandings as they relate to our time of Redemption.

Rabbi Kook began his speech to the crowded assembly by recalling the night in November, nineteen years before, when the United Nations voted to partition the Palestine of the British Mandate into a truncated Jewish State. The gentile nations of the world were negotiating in New York on the allocation of Palestine between the Arabs and the Jews. Radios all over Israel were tuned to the broadcast. Suddenly, Rav Kook, said, the announcement came....

The *Rosh Yeshiva* paused in his speech. His emotion filled the hall. That night nineteen years before, when the announcement had come over the radio, a spontaneous joy had swept over the country. Men, women, and children rushed out of their homes to dance in the streets and

celebrate the news that after nearly two thousand years of exile, Israel would have its own State. Yet, *HaRav* Tzvi Yehuda had a different reaction. As he recounted the UN decision, his voice echoed with pain:

“The connection to the Holy Temple,” he began. “The connection to the *Kedusha*, to holiness, and to the life, and to the soul....”

He couldn’t finish the sentence that spoke of the dividing of Jerusalem. The memory overwhelmed him. He wept as he stood before the students and guests of the Yeshiva, who had come to celebrate Israel Independence Day. The connection to Jerusalem, and to our Holy Land, our life and our soul, had been severed by the decision in New York to partition our Land. *Eretz Yisrael*, the eternal inheritance of our forefathers, had been cut into pieces. Portions of the country had been placed into foreign hands. In that hour, when the multitudes were celebrating on the streets of the country, *Rav* Tzvi Yehuda sat alone in his father’s old room in Jerusalem. Even nineteen years later, the pain of the memory was etched on his face.

“I couldn’t leave the house,” he said. “How heartbroken I was. I couldn’t go out to join the festive celebration on Jaffe Street. I couldn’t take part in the rejoicing.”

“I sat alone. Distressed. It weighed so heavily on me. In those first hours, I couldn’t come to terms with what had happened. The word of *Hashem* had come to pass – ‘*They have divided My Land!*’ (Joel, 4:2). With all of my effort and strength, with all of my soul and my spirit and willpower, it was impossible for me to go outside.”

“How could it be that I didn’t go out?” he rhetorically asked.

"THEY DIVIDED MY LAND!" he shouted. Then, forcefully, he cried out, "WHERE IS OUR HEVRON?! DO WE FORGET THIS?! AND WHERE IS OUR SHECHEM?! DO WE FORGET ABOUT THIS?! AND WHERE IS OUR JERICHO?! DO WE FORGET THIS, TOO?! AND WHERE IS OUR OTHER-SIDE OF THE JORDAN?! WHERE IS EACH BLOCK OF OUR EARTH?! EACH PART AND PARCEL OF *HASHEM'S* LAND?!"

"IS IT IN OUR HANDS TO RELINQUISH ANY MILLIMETER OF THIS?!" he shouted, and answered, "G-D FORBID!"

Everyone in the Yeshiva was silent. People had gathered to celebrate our Independence, but Rav Tzvi Yehuda wanted everyone to know and to feel that our triumph was still incomplete.

"And so I couldn't go out to the street," Rav Kook continued. "I couldn't in this situation, when I was so utterly wounded, when I was so cut to pieces. *THEY DIVIDED MY LAND!*"

"THEY DIVIDED THE LAND OF *HASHEM!* Because of political considerations!"

"I couldn't go out and dance and be merry, the way we dance and are joyous today. That was the way it was that night, during those hours."

The Rosh Yeshiva's anguish over the partitioning of *Eretz Yisrael* was shared by Rabbi Yaacov Moshe Harlop, a student and close friend of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook, Rav Tzvi Yehuda's father. The day after the UN announcement, he came to visit HaRav Tzvi Yehuda in Rabbi's Kook's old house on Jaffa Street. They sat in the same room which Rabbi Kook had used as his study, and huddled together, shattered over what had occurred. Then, finding encouragement in

each other, they quoted the verse of Hallel, *"This is the L-rd's doing; it is wondrous in our eyes."* Only then, Rav Tzvi Yehuda told the crowd, did he find the strength to go out to the nation.

"That first night, I didn't go out to dance in the streets, because I felt that I, like the Land of Israel, had been cut into pieces and wounded in my heart. But afterward, with faith in *Hashem*, I knew that we would overcome the difficulties. I began to go out each year to dance on *Yom Haatzmaut* – out of recognition of *Hashem's* Providence, which is active in all of the events of our time."

Rav Kook's love for *Hashem* caused him to mourn the tragic state of affairs that not all of the nation celebrated the day as a holiday, nor recognized the miracles which the Almighty had performed for us in gathering our exiles back to Zion and leading us to renewed sovereignty in our Land.

"In the early years of the State, I used to go out and wander about the streets of Jerusalem for several hours to be with the joyous nation, the multitudes of young men and women. I saw this as a *mitzvah*, as an obligation, as it says, *'Let Israel rejoice in its Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King'* (Tehillim, 149:2). To my sadness, each time, I was filled with regret by something which borders on a *Chillul Hashem*, a desecration of G-d. The Elders, the *Gedolei Torah*, they didn't appear. Why weren't they out on the streets of Jerusalem? Each year, how I longed to see them."

Today, dear blog readers, we can learn from Rav Tzvi Yehuda what our orientation should be toward Israel Independence Day, in light of the disturbing events of our times. Yes, we have problems in Israel, and

setbacks, and painful losses, and cause for tears – but we must remember that everything that transpires in our cherished Holy Land is the workings of *Hashem*, “*This is the L-rd’s doing; it is wondrous in our eyes.*” Our principle feeling should be joy in our Statehood and thanks to the Almighty for bringing it to pass after an exile of 2000 years.

As *HaRav* Tzvi Yehuda said:

“Our joy on this day is the joy of a *mitzvah*. We have merited to sanctify *Hashem’s* Name in the Land. We have merited to fulfill the Torah commandment of dwelling in *Eretz Yisrael*, as taught by the Ramban, through his own example of *aliyah* to live in Israel, and through his halachic ruling that dwelling in Israel is a positive commandment of the Torah – that this Land be in our hands, in a national sense, and not in the hands of any other nation.”

“It is true that there are shortcomings, and matters which have to be changed. We don’t hide our eyes from the things which need to be improved. This is not to be questioned. Rather, we expect that as the years pass, the problems will be solved.”

Rav Kook reminded his students of one of the Rambam’s principles of faith regarding the *Mashiach*: “Even though his coming is delayed, even with all this, I will wait for him.”

“We have faith,” *Rav* Tzvi Yehuda said, “even with all of the problems that his coming involves. “For there is no doubt that the problems will all be healed in the perpetual process of perfecting the souls of our nation.”

“The intrinsic value of the State of Israel is not dependent on the number of Orthodox Jews who live here. Of course, our aspiration is that all of our people will embrace the Torah and its *mitzvot*. However, the Statehood of Israel is holy, whatever religious level it has. Anyone who refuses to recognize that State of Israel does not recognize the return of the Divine Presence to Zion.”

Only a child expects his desires to be fulfilled at once. Rav Kook emphasized that the Redemption of the Jewish Nation was a gigantic, world historic undertaking of colossal dimensions, which unfolds “Little by little, like the dawning of the sun” (Jerusalem Talmud, Berachot, 1:1).

“Patience,” he said, “is not surrender. True patience, the patience of holiness, is bound^[SP7] to the call for perfection. There is no contradiction between the drive for perfection, in all of its force, with patience which understands that perfection is achieved in gradual stages, from year to passing year.”

The Talmud asserts that the Land of Israel is acquired through suffering (Berachot 20A). Difficulties, wars, advances and setbacks are all a part of G-d’s plan. Our Sages compare the Redemption of Israel to a gazelle bounding over a mountainside. Sometimes the gazelle leaps into sight, and other times it seems to vanish, until it leaps into view once again.

“The setbacks we face are temporary,” Rav Tzvi Yehuda assured. “All steps backwards are transitory and passing. Just as there are stages in everything, there are stages of conquering the Land of Israel. Advances sometimes come in hidden stages. But these are only temporary delays. One shouldn’t be juvenile. One must look at the global upheaval

involved in bringing us back to our Land and recognize the Divine unfolding of, *'When the L-rd brought the exiles to Zion'* (Tehillim, 126:1). Because of its staggering scale, the process naturally undergoes difficulties and problems. The greater a thing is, the more complicated it is. The unfolding of our Redemption is a historical event of colossal proportions. Anything which stands in the way of our inexorable march to fulfillment is merely a brief delay of, *'His anger is only a moment'* (Tehillim, 30:6). All of the disturbances are trivialities which have no lasting substance in this sweeping historical process. It is true that there are occasionally difficult and trying situations, but we shall overcome. The actions of the gentiles, or of the superficially-thinking Jews, which oppose this Divine historic plan, carry no weight whatsoever. These become null and void in the light of the Torah and *Hashem's* Providence over His people."

So, don't worry. Be happy!

Happy *Yom Haazmaut*!

Marshmallows

This year, I have decided to print out the talkbacks of the scorners who discourage Jews from living in Israel, and use the paper to light the coals of our Israel Independence Day barbecue. That way, by helping to cook our hamburgers, chicken wings, and marshmallows, they will have a part in the festive celebration. Let that be their *tikun* for all of the negative things they have written this year about *Medinat Yisrael*. Let it be like a sacrificial offering of thanksgiving for them, thanking G-d for having granted us our own Jewish State in our eternal Jewish homeland, after an exile of nearly two thousand years.

Happy barbecue, friends!

The Greatest *Mitzvah* of All

This is for my brothers and sisters in Israel, to remind ourselves how lucky we are to be living in *Eretz HaKodesh*. As we have written many times, the Holy Land is the Holy Land, no matter who is the Prime Minister, or how asinine government policy may be, or how long you have to wait on line when you need something at the Ministry of the Interior. Israel is G-d's Chosen Land, and for that alone it is worth living here more than any other place in the world.

This is just for Israelis because my brothers and sisters in the Diaspora, whom I love very much, get angry at me when I remind them that true Jewish life is in Israel. For instance, in the Torah portion we read this past *Shabbat*, we learn about the Hebrew slave who doesn't want to cease serving his master when his years of servitude have ended. Because he prefers serving a mortal, rather than be free to serve G-d, his ear which heard the commandment, "*I am the L-rd your G-d*," is nailed to the doorpost of the door (Shemot, 21:5, Rashi). Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook, of blessed memory, would refer to this sad situation when referring to Jews who preferred to remain in the exile, rather than coming to live in the Land of the Jews. "These people say, 'I love my master, the gentile. I will not go out free.'"

Let me give you another example. Our Sages inform us that the Jews of Egypt survived their bondage under their foreign masters because they guarded their names, their dress, their language, and the ways of Jewish modesty. They didn't give their children *goyisha* names like Mark, Chris, Sally, or Jane. They walked around proudly with *kippot* and *tzitzit*, not hiding their Jewishness under a baseball cap, nor mimicking

the fashions of the *goyim*. They continued to speak Hebrew, rather than Egyptian, English, or French. And they stayed away from the orgies of their Egyptian neighbors, and refrained from watching the Academy Awards.

If you think it is an inconsequential thing for a Jew to speak Hebrew, you are mistaken. The Hebrew language was given to us by G-d. He wants us to speak in the *Lashon HaKodesh* (Holy Tongue) because we are a Holy People. Hebrew is Divinely geared to the Jewish mind and Jewish way of thinking. A Jewish child who grows up speaking Hebrew sees the world, left to right, through Jewish glasses. A child who grows up speaking English sees the world backwards, from right to left, through the gentile worldview. If you don't believe a has-been Hollywood screenwriter like me, look at Rashi. On the verse in the *Shema*, "*And you shall teach them to your children to speak of them,*" (Devarim, 11:19), he writes:

"On this it has been said, when the child begins to talk, the father should speak to him in the Holy Tongue and teach him Torah, and if he doesn't do this, it is like he buries him" (Rashi, there).

When I write these things, my brothers and sisters in the Diaspora get angry at me, even though I love them dearly and have their very best interests at heart. Because I know when they get to Heaven with their suitcases from America, Australia, and England, the angel guarding the celestial gate is going to escort them to a motley two-star hotel.

"Hey, we want the luxury condominium by the golf course!" they are sure to protest.

“You opted for the luxury condominium and golf course in the world down below,” the angel will explain. “You should have chosen to live in Israel.”

“What does it matter?” they’ll claim. “We kept the *mitzvos*.”

“You kept the *mitzvos*,” he’ll answer, “But you didn’t keep the greatest *mitzvah* of all.”

The Secret of *Lag B'Omer*

Tonight is *Lag B'Omer*. I wasn't intending to write a blog this evening, but it is impossible to keep silent at the incredible wonder of this day. Not only are the hillsides of Jerusalem ablaze with towering bonfires in tribute to the secrets of Torah that Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai revealed; not only are the streets of Jerusalem perfumed with the smoke of burning embers; the hillsides and streets of all of the country are ablaze with joyous bonfires, and lit up with the glow of love that our people hold for the Torah. Not only the streets, my friends, but the smoke of the holy flames penetrates into every single apartment and house, like the aroma of *havdalah* after *Shabbat*, penetrating through windows and concrete walls to reveal the inner Torah spirit of every Israeli soul, and every Israeli house, to reveal the inner holiness of the entire country of Israel, whose national soul is completely Torah, no matter how secular its surface appearance may seem.

This is what Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai taught us. To see below the surface appearance of life to the inner reality, where the light of G-d and Torah shine in an eternal, unquenchable blaze.

The *Zohar* of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai teaches that the original, pure, lofty idea of the ingathering of the exiles to Zion is that the revival of the Jewish Nation in Israel is the earthly foundation for the revelation of the Kingdom of G-d in the world (*Zohar*, Ki Tisa, 276A). However, when a holy idea needs to be grounded in reality, it necessarily descends from its exalted elevation. When this happens, people of lesser spiritual sensitivities seize the idea and profane its true intent. Because greater numbers of people can grasp the idea in its minimized

form, its followers increase, bringing more strength and vigor to its practical implementation. This accounts for the secularism that we see in the State of Israel today. The original holy call of the Prophets, promising our return and rebirth in the Land, was adopted by the masses and turned into a national secular Zionist movement. This trend continues until the inner spiritual light of Torah, embedded in the Nation as a whole, arises to banish the material darkness.

“This process will surely come about,” Rabbi Kook wrote. “The light of G-d, which is buried away in the fundamental point of Zion, and which is now concealed by clouds, will surely appear. All those who cling to it, the near and the distant, will be uplifted with it, for a true revival and an everlasting salvation.”

As the *Lag B'Omer* bonfires blaze all over Israel, filling the sky with the aroma of incense burning on the Temple altar, we know that the holy essence of *Am Yisrael* guarantees that the Nation will return to its roots.

“The nation’s eyes will be opened, its soul will be cleansed, its light will shine, its wings will spread, a reborn Nation will arise, a great, awesome, and numerous people, filled with the light of G-d and the majesty of Nationhood. *‘Behold, the people shall rise up like a great lion, and like a young lion, it shall lift itself up’*” (Rabbi Kook, Orot HaT’shuva, 15:11).

Amen.

Yom Yerushalayim

The adjoining neighborhoods of Givat Shaul and Kiryat Moshe, where we live in Jerusalem, near the *Mercaz Harav Yeshiva*, is an interesting blend of religious Zionists, *Haredim*, and *Hasidim*. Sometimes in the morning, depending on which *mikvah* I go to, I *daven* in one of the *Haredi* shuls in the area. This morning after prayers, I said *shalom* to a *Hasid* acquaintance, and wished him a “*Hag Samaoch*” holiday greeting on this coming evening’s “*Yom Yerushalayim*” – Jerusalem Day.

“*Azeh hag?*” he replied in a deriding tone. “What holiday?”

“*Yom Yerushalayim*,” I reminded him.

“I’ll be saying *Tachanun* like always,” he assured me, referring to the daily penitential prayer which religious Zionists omit on the joyous *Yom Yerushalayim*, just like on all other holidays.

“A person has to thank *Hashem* for the kindnesses which He grants us, including returning us to *Yerushalayim*.” I told him. “Is that an insignificant thing in your eyes? After all, that’s what we’ve been praying for these last 2000 years.”

“This *traf* non-kosher *Medinah* of yours isn’t what I’ve been praying for,” he assured me. “Who needs your *apikorsim* Zionist buddies and your pork-eating soldiers?”

“Tell me,” I answered. “How long do you think you’d survive in your comfortable apartment if not for those soldiers? Maybe a half hour before the Arabs would arrive to slit your throats.”

“Nonsense,” he retorted. “Before the Zionists came here, the Jews and the Arabs lived together in peace.”

“Tell the Jews of Hevron and the Old City who were slaughtered in pogroms that they were living in peace.”

“It was the Zionists who stirred up the Arabs,” he insisted.

“You know I like you,” I told him. “But you talk like a jerk. If it weren’t for the State and the army, you and all of your friends would either be dead or back in Poland by now.”

“All a Jew has to do is pray and *HaKodesh Baruch Hu* will take care of enemies,” he insisted.

“I don’t mean to give you a lesson in Torah and history, but in the war against Amalek, Moshe didn’t just pray – he sent Yehoshua into battle. When we entered the Land, we chopped up the Canaanites with our swords, not only with our *siddurs*. And while David *HaMelech* left half of his troops to study and pray, he led the other half in hand-to-hand combat with the Philistines. He didn’t conquer Jerusalem by praying, he led his soldiers in a surprise attack through the underground tunnels of the city and chopped off as many Jebusite heads as he could.”

“Ahhh, who has time for your stories?” he answered.

“When you eat, do you just say a blessing, or do you put the food in your mouth?” I asked.

“What’s the connection?” he asked.

“And do you just pray for a livelihood, or do you go to your bakery and work?”

“What’s all this have to do with your rotten *Medinah*?” he asked.

“And if your tooth aches, G-d forbid, do you just *daven* to *Hashem*, or do you go to the dentist as well?”

“Who can talk to you?” he said, brushing me away with his hand. “The trouble with you people is that you don’t learn Torah.”

With that he walked away.

I don’t know what Torah he learns, but that’s what it says in mine.

Hag Samaoch!

History of the World Revisited

Like I've written, the young American Birthright kids that come over to our house for a *Shabbat* meal know practically nothing about Jewish history and Judaism. So, while they are chomping my on my wife's delicious cooking, I try to give them a crash course in world history from a Torah point of view.

You'll have to settle with a condensed version, because it's still early in the morning, and without the *etrog* liquor of *Shabbat*, it's hard to get inspired.

So here goes. This is what I tell them....

"In the beginning, the L-rd created the heaven and the earth."

This means, guys, that the world has a King. Our lives are dependent upon Him. We may think everything happens automatically by nature, but in fact, we can only speak, and see, and talk, and walk, because of Him. Every second of our lives come from Him. The minute He turns the switch off, it's curtains. So when the King of the World gives a command, it's our job to obey.

That's the whole story of the Garden of Eden. It isn't a historic, scientific account of Creation, but a simple moral lesson. G-d is the Creator and King, and we are His servants. When He gives us a command, He wants us to do it. It's as simple as that. Adam and Eve blew it, so they were expelled from the Garden. History Lesson #1.

Now you guys know the story of Noah and the Ark, right? Noah was supposed to take Adam's place and teach the world the very same lesson, that G-d is the King and that mankind is here to serve Him, but

when he left the ark after the floodwaters subsided, he got a little too pickled, and he ended up blowing it too, just like Adam before him.

Usually, in deference to my wife, who sits like an angel at the other end of the table, I don't go into the details about how the sexual immorality of the generation brought on the flood. Instead, at the end of the meal, I give each guest a present of my book, "Secret of the Brit," where they can find everything they wanted to know about Jewish sexuality but were too embarrassed to ask.

Then comes the Tower of Babel when people started shooting arrows at G-d, hoping to kill Him, because they didn't want anyone interfering in their lives and telling them what they could do in their bedrooms and out on the street.

So, in punishment, mankind was scattered to the four corners of the globe, just like they had been scattering their you-know-what all over the place, and matters kept getting worse until Abraham appeared on the scene and began teaching the world's heathens that there was only one G-d who ruled over the world and that He expected people to do His bidding. Of course, no one wanted to hear about that either, so they threw him into a burning furnace. Seeing that there was finally someone on earth who could take Adam's place, G-d miraculously saved Abraham and commanded him to go to a special holy location, the Land of Israel, that had been especially created for holy souls like his. There, in the HOLY LAND, Abraham and his offspring would teach the whole world the message of G-d, not as scattered individuals around the globe, but as a unique, HOLY NATION, in its unique HOLY LAND.

Once again, in deference to my angel of a wife, who patiently puts up with hearing the same old story, because she knows how important it is for these kids to hear the truth at least one time in their lives, in deference to her, I don't go into the details of the *Brit* between G-d and Abraham, trusting that they will read about it in my book on the plane ride back to Babylon.

After popping open a new bottle of wine and mixing it with a few beers, I tell them about the famine in the Land and the bondage in Egypt until finally G-d had mercy and commanded Moses to take the Jews out of Egypt and bring them back to *Eretz Yisrael*.

Which brings us to *Shavuot*, commemorating the giving of the Torah, which is just a few days away. G-d freed us from bondage in Egypt, I tell them, but we didn't yet know who we were. For over 200 years, we had been slaves to Egypt, surrounded by their perverse and immoral culture, which screwed up our brains, just like growing up in the immoral culture of America screws up our brains today. But now that we had left Egypt and were a newborn nation on our own – who were we? What kind of nation were we to be? We were to be G-d's CHOSEN NATION, his messengers in the world, by being a HOLY NATION in our special HOLY LAND, as it says, "*From ZION shall go forth Torah, and the word of the L-rd from JERUSALEM.*"

But before we could get there, there was a stop on the way, at Mount Sinai, to pick up the Torah, which was going to be our holy national constitution, just like every nation needs a constitution and charter. For the Jewish People to live in our special HOLY LAND, we needed a special holy culture and way of life, so the Land wouldn't spit us out, like it was

about to spit out the heathen savages that were dwelling there when Joshua arrived and blew on his trumpets.

Believe me, the story is a lot more exciting when I tell it in person, because the *etrog* liquor goes to my head and I begin to march in circles around the table, singing in my deepest baritone voice, “Joshua and the battle of Jericho, Jericho, Jericho. Joshua and the battle of Jericho, and the walls came tumbling down!”

But, even though we had just witnessed the splitting of the sea and the greatest miracles in the world in Egypt, and even though we just heard the voice of G-d booming out to us from a cloud on the mountain, we blew it, like Adam and Noah of old, first with the golden calf, and then with the greatest transgression in Jewish history, the devastating sin of the Spies who discouraged the Jews from journeying on to the Land of Israel. For this act of rebellion, G-d killed the entire generation, except for the women and children, and we had to wait forty years for a braver generation to arise, a generation of free men, who were not slaves to a foreign culture, just like we are today in the Diaspora.

L’chaim! Drink and be merry! Then, while their mouths are stuffed with *shnitzel* and *chulent*, and their heads are swirling with wine, I make a swift, painless incision in the back of their skulls and remove the layers of foreign cultures and values in their brains.

“We’d rather stay here in the desert!” the Spies proclaimed. “In Israel, we’ll have to fight in the army, and work hard to make a living, while here we’ve got it made with air conditioned *shuls*, supermarket home deliveries, and swimming pools in our backyards.”

So G-d wiped them out for rebelling against His word in refusing to make *aliyah* to Israel. Obviously, they hadn't learned the lesson of Adam. They wanted to do what they wanted to do – not what G-d commanded. They wanted the “good life,” rather than journeying on to the Promised Land.

But it doesn't work that way, guys. Cause, just like if you fill a car engine with the wrong kind of gas, the motor goes *kaput*, if you fill up a Jew's head with a foreign culture, or with a water-downed Torah that pretends a Jew isn't supposed to live his life in Israel, sooner or later, the motor is going to sputter, putter, and die.

So, my good friends, from the time of the Exodus from Egypt, and that first *Shavuot* with the giving of the Torah until today, G-d has commanded us to be the Children of Israel, “*Bnei Yisrael*.” Not the people of America, and not the people of France, but the “Children of Israel,” because the Torah is supposed to be lived in Israel, just like G-d says over and over and over again in the Torah, chapter after chapter after chapter, to make sure that everyone gets the message.

Now it's time to bring the special bottle of *etrog* liquor to the table. If I am already too smashed, I ask one of my teenage sons to read our guests some verses in the Torah in their funny-sounding English, commanding the Jews to observe the Torah in Israel.

As Sholom Aleichem would say, “To make a long story short,” the Jews finally got to the Promised Land, but we blew it again when we strayed away from the Torah. Just like G-d had warned, He kicked us out of our Land, just as He had expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden. But when the time came to return home from Babylon, we still hadn't learned the

lesson. Most of the Babylonian Jews preferred to stay in a foreign land with their businesses and riches, rather than return to rebuild the Jewish State and Temple. And even though G-d gave us another chance, we blew it once again with our transgressions, until G-d sent the Romans to kick us out of the Holy Land again, this time for 2000 years. Scattered amongst the nations, we were a hated minority in other people's countries, persecuted and plundered, until we thought that we could escape the "Jewish Problem" by being good Spaniards and Germans. But that backfired on us, too, when the *goyim*, sooner or later, reminded us that we were Jews who didn't belong in their land. If it wasn't the Christians slaughtering millions of us, and the Moslems trying to slaughter the rest, it was the Nazis and the Leninists and the Americans with their bear hug of assimilation that is eating away at our flesh, until finally guys like you know nothing about your history and heritage at all.

Get up off the floor, you innocent babes who have been kidnapped from embracing the noble inheritance of your Forefathers. You want to know about your birthright?! Well, you're hearing about it now! Listen to what I have to say, or you won't get any of my wife's delicious homemade, non-dairy ice cream and cake.

YOU ARE NOT AMERICANS! YOU ARE JEWS! YOU ARE THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL! You don't belong in America. You belong in Israel. But nobody ever told you the true story before, so all you think about is the latest movies, getting stoned, meeting chicks, and what kind of jobs you are going to have.

And don't think that this is just the ranting of some crazy religious long beard who doesn't know what the world is really about, cause take a look at this picture from my Hollywood days when I was living the great big American lie, chasing after money and fame in order to be accepted like one of the *goyim*.

I'm a guy who's been there and back, with battle scars all over my body, so listen good when I tell you that there's no escaping being a Jew, cause there's no escaping G-d! It's all in the Bible, fellas. It's all in these hundreds of books on the shelves of this house, books that you won't find in your gentile universities, or in your Americanized homes, because no one wants you to discover the truth. But open your ears and open your eyes, and see for yourselves! G-d promised to bring us back to Israel, and He is bringing us back! And now you have become a part of it!

Have a little more liquor, guys, and let's take a flight into outer space. Imagine you're in a space station looking back down toward the Earth. Imagine that all the Jews are little lights. What do you see? For the last hundred years, you'd see lights from all over the world slowly congregating to the Land of Israel. Little by little, the lights in the Diaspora flicker and fade, and a great beacon of light shines out of Israel. G-d is bringing us back! That's what's happening, Mr. Jones, whether or not you know what it is! *"When the L-rd brings back the captives of Zion, we were like those who dream!"* And now you guys are part of this colossal historic undertaking. You, too, have come back to Israel. The door has been opened. Your eyes have been made to see. The Almighty G-d of Israel has chosen you three guys and brought you here to this house so that you can hear the truth, and see what's really

going on, baby, to get hip to what the life of a Jew is all about, to learn who you really are and what your real mission is in this world.

And if you want to know the real reason why the whole world goes nuts when a handful of Jews start to live in a caravan on top of a deserted hillside in the middle of nowhere on the West bank of the Jordan, it is because when G-d kicked the Jews out of Israel 2000 years ago, the Christians began teaching that G-d had abandoned the Jews and chose the Christians instead, Heaven forbid. So when we return to the Land of Israel and build a superpower in 60 short years, the Vatican and the Christian world freak out because it's a slap in the face to their founding doctrine, exposing the lie they have been peddling over the world that they are the chosen people, not us. And when Israel returns to its homeland, the Arabs go wild, because Islam was also founded on the claim that Allah abandoned the Jews and chose the followers of the Muslim Madman instead, Heaven forbid, so that when we smash them to smithereens in war after war, their doctrines are exposed for the utter falsehoods they are. So both the Muslims and Christians go bananas when Jews with *yarmulkes* and *tzitzit* return to the cities and hilltops of the Bible, and they do everything in their power to stop the settlers and divide up our Land. Cause they know that if the Jews return to settle all of the Promised Land and rebuilt the ancient Temple, then their religions are finished. And if they acknowledge the G-d of Israel as the one and only G-d, then they are going to have to give up their corrupt and adulterous ways, and live according to the rules of the Torah.

So, my dear young friends – the choice is before you. You can return to your make-believe lives as Americans, or you can hop on the spaceship

Enterprise of Jewish destiny and become a partner with G-d in bringing the Jewish People back to Israel and rebuilding the HOLY NATION OF ISRAEL in its HOLY LAND.

As it says in the Blessing after Meals, *“When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the L-rd your G-d for the GOOD LAND He has given you,”* and it ain’t talkin about Brooklyn or LA, my friends, no it ain’t talkin about Brooklyn or LA.

Shavuot

This brings us to the question: why was the Torah given in the wilderness of Sinai? One answer, favored by Diasporites, is that the Torah was given in the wilderness of Sinai to demonstrate that the Torah can be kept anywhere, not only in the Land of Israel. This reasoning ignores the teaching of “The Kuzari” that the Sinai Peninsula is a part of the Land of Israel. According to this understanding, the Torah was indeed given to the Jewish People in Israel, to show that this is where the Torah is supposed to be kept.

But even if we want to grant credibility to the view which maintains that the Torah was given in the wilderness of Sinai to teach that Jews can live a life of Torah anywhere in the world, the Torah itself soon informs us otherwise, when *Hashem* tells the Jewish People that they have lingered in Sinai long enough, and that it is time to go up and take possession of all of the Land of Israel (Devarim, 1:5-8).

Thus, we learn that the Torah was given in Sinai precisely to teach us that the Torah and the commandments aren’t meant to be performed there, but rather in the Land of Israel.

Happy *Shavuot*!

The Only Ballpark in Town

If you want proof that *Eretz Yisrael* is the place where the commandments are meant to be performed, just take a look at the holiday of *Shavuot*.

The holiday of *Shavuot* has only two Torah commandments, both of which can only be performed in *Eretz Yisrael*. One is the bringing of the first fruits, "*HaBikurim*," as is written: "*And you shall take from the first of every fruit of the ground, which you shall bring from **your Land***" (Devarim, 26:2). Only fruits from the Land Of Israel (your Land) may be brought to Jerusalem on the Festival.

The second *mitzvah* is the bringing of the two loaves of bread to the Temple, marking permission to use the new crop of grain for sacrificial purposes, as it says: "*From **your dwellings**, you shall bring two loaves of bread for heaving*" (Vayikra, 23:17), which can only come from *Eretz Yisrael*, and not from other lands (Mishna, Kelim, 1:6).

You can try bringing fruit or a bagel from Brooklyn, but it won't be accepted. Not even fruit from Monsey, NY.

While *Shavuot* in the Diaspora is characterized by the emphasis on Torah study, in Israel, in addition to the intensive all-night Torah study which takes place all over the country, the days leading to the holiday are marked by songs of *Eretz Yisrael* on the radio, agricultural exhibitions in school, and parades celebrating the new harvest and the fruits of *Eretz Yisrael*, in the joyous spirit of the great pageant with which the first fruits were brought to Jerusalem in days of yore.

Thus, the Festival of *Shavuot* is intrinsically bound with praising *Hashem* for the agricultural bounty of *Eretz Yisrael*. This praise and sense of gratitude is highlighted in the speech that every Jew must make to the *Kohen* when he brings his first fruits to the Temple:

"I profess this day to the L-rd thy G-d that I am come to the country that the L-rd swore to our fathers to give us... and He brought us to this place and gave us this Land, a Land flowing with milk and honey" (Devarim, 26:1-15).

Additionally, the bringing of the *Omer*, upon which the Counting of the *Omer* is based between *Pesach* and *Shavuot*, can only be brought from *Eretz Yisrael*, as the Torah commands: *"When you come to the Land... and reap its harvest, then you shall bring an omer of your first harvest to the kohen"* (Vayikra, 23:10). *"Its harvest"* means from the Land of Israel. In fact, the Mishna teaches that: *"Any precept involving land applies only in Eretz Yisrael"* (Kiddushin, 1:9).

The centrality of *Eretz Yisrael* to Jewish life can also be seen in other aspects of the *Shavuot* holiday. For instance, in Megillat Ruth, when Naomi's husband, Elimelech, and two sons, Machlon and Kilyon, leave the Land of Israel and go to Moav, they are stricken to death in Divine punishment for having abandoned the Land.

Also, we honor King David, who was born and died on *Shavuot* day, by reading from the Book of Psalms. King David was so fervently attached to *Eretz Yisrael* that he looked upon leaving it as if he were forced to worship idols. When he had to escape to the land of the Philistines in order to escape Saul, who was pursuing him in murderous wrath, David moaned, *"For they have driven me out this day from being joined to the*

inheritance of the L-rd, saying 'Go serve other gods'” (Shmuel 1:26:19). The Talmud asks, “Did someone really tell David to serve other gods?” In answer, the Talmud states: “Rather, it comes to teach you that anyone who dwells outside the Land of Israel is like someone who worships idols” (Ketubot 110B).

And to top everything, nothing can match the incredible experience of walking to the *Kotel* in the wee hours of Shavuot morning with a crowd of twenty, maybe thirty thousand Jews, who flock to the Old City from all parts of Jerusalem to reach the place of the Temple Mount by dawn.

True, Ebbets Field was in Brooklyn, but they tore it down. Today, when you talk about Torah, *Eretz Yisrael* is the only ballpark in town.

Kids, Teenagers, Beware!

According to Jewish Law, every Jew is obligated to study the Torah, whether he be rich or poor, healthy or ailing, youthful or old. He must set aside a definite time during the day and at night for the study of Torah, as it says, *“Thou shall meditate therein day and night”* (Rambam, Laws of Torah Study, 1:8). In addition, the Torah is read publically in synagogue twice during the week and on *Shabbat*.

We learn Torah because this is G-d's will for the Jewish People. The Torah is our soul. It is also our National Constitution. It is our way of life. Throughout the ages, we have been known as “The People of the Book,” and the Torah is our book. There are a lot of books in the world but the Torah is ours. The only way a Jew can understand what it is to be a Jew is by learning the Torah. If he doesn't study the Torah, he may think he knows who he is, but he really doesn't.

The Torah is not a long ago, once-upon-a-time, fairytale story. The Torah teaches us what G-d expects from us today. The tales of our holy forefathers are examples for us to follow, as our Sages have taught: “The doings of the forefathers are signs for their sons.”

As we have previously written, give any eight-year-old child the Torah and let him read about Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaacov, then ask him where G-d wants the Jewish People to live. G-d commanded our forefathers to live in the Land of Israel. They only departed from the Land in time of severe famine, and then returned as soon as they could. To highlight this to his children, when it came time for Yaacov to die, he made Yosef swear that he would bury him in Hevron, so that they shouldn't forget that, no matter how good a life they had in Egypt, they

were strangers in a strange land. Our Sages explain that Yaacov wanted to establish for all posterity the principle that *Eretz Yisrael* was their only heritage. He knew that his burial in Hevron alongside Avraham and Yitzhak would forge an unbreakable bond between his descendants and the Land that *Hashem* had promised to give them. Yaacov was especially assertive in making Yosef swear because Yaacov saw that his children had become possessed by the foreign land. “Soon,” he reasoned, “they might substitute the Nile for the Jordan, and what began as a temporary sojourn in Egypt would no longer seem to them an exile” (See, Artscroll, Bereshit, Vol. 6, Pg. 2090).

Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch summarizes: “This was his motive for so ceremoniously insisting that they should not bury him in Egypt, but that they should carry him to their true homeland. This was the reason he told them, ‘Though you may wish to live in Egypt, I refuse to be even buried here.’ This is why he used his name Israel in expressing his wish – he spoke as Israel, the bearer of their national mission.”

Yaacov’s teaching was not only for his children, but for his children’s children, and for their children after. His teaching is for us – those of us who cling to the Diaspora and all of its foreign lands.

So kids, teenagers, BEWARE! If they tell you that you are American or Australian or Englishmen or Mexicans – don’t believe them! You are the Children of Israel. “*Bnei Yisrael*.” The Land of Israel is our country. Jerusalem is our capital. Being a complete Jew means living in Israel. That’s what our forefathers wanted to teach us. That’s what the Torah tells us over and over again. That’s what G-d wants for His People – to be His children in His Land.

Hear O Deaf, and Look O Blind

Friday morning, I was walking down the street when a Jewish helicopter flew overhead. I still react with a happy shiver whenever I see a Jewish helicopter soar by up in the sky.

“Baruch Hashem,” I said. *“Thank you, Hashem,* for giving us helicopters and rescuing us from the lands of the gentiles.”

I spent over thirty years in New York, and New England, and California, and an assortment of other places in America, and I never saw a Jewish helicopter. Moments later, as if to reward me for my enthusiasm and gratitude, *Hashem* sent three Israel Air Force jets streaking through the sky over Jerusalem. *“Thank you, Hashem,”* I said, *“for giving us Jewish fighter planes and Jewish pilots.”* After all, as I mentioned, I spent over thirty years in New York, and New England, and California, and an assortment of other places in America, and I never saw a Jewish fighter plane. It just isn’t possible. Why? Because America isn’t Jewish. America belongs to Esau, our arch enemy.

These past few weeks, we have been reading in the Torah a capsule blueprint of world history. First, we met Avraham, the father of the nation chosen by G-d to bring G-d’s word to the world through our living a life of holiness in the Land of Israel. Then we met Yishmael, the wild beast of a man, whose descendants, the Arabs have been contesting our right to the Land of Israel, right down to this very day. Then, we met the hairy ape, Esav, or Esau, as he is called in translation. From the very womb, he has been contesting our place as the Divine chosen nation, doing everything in his power to usurp us from our role. Esav is Edom. His descendants became the Romans, and the Germans,

the Russians, and the Americans. Edom is Christianity and the whole Christian world. America is a Christian country.

So when a Jewish helicopter flies overhead, I get goose pimples, and remember to thank G-d for all of His kindness and goodness that He has rescued us from the lands of Edom and returned us to our own Promised Land. To me, that's the greatest miracle there is. To me, that's the greatest revelation of *Hashem* in the world. Just as He promised our forefathers, He has returned us to our Land. There is no greater historic evidence of G-d's existence than this. The State of Israel is the greatest sanctification of G-d in the world.

Unfortunately, there are still some people who haven't caught on to the idea that the main goal of Judaism is to build the JEWISH NATION in the Land of Israel, in all of its earthy facets, agricultural, political, industrial, technological, military, scientific, jobs, hospitals, electric companies, police, highways, sewage, supermarkets, firemen, etc., etc., etc. ad infinitum. They act as if it is enough to sway back and forth in prayer, and trust that cities and highways and the *Beit HaMikdash* will all appear miraculously from out of the sky without them having to get their hands dirty in the nitty gritty job of picking tomatoes and oiling the rifles needed to protect them against the descendants of Yishmael who are just drooling to slit their throats. In the meantime, the "*shabbos goys*" of *Medinat Yisrael*, which they reject, are doing all the work for them, in building the foundations of *Malchut Hashem* in the world, while supplying their communities with water, electric, sewage, and medical care, and protecting their lives from the daggers of Islam.

With great sadness, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook would often speak about this shameful situation, how segments of the Torah world rejected *Medinat Yisrael*. He said the very same blindness and small mindedness took place at the time of the Second Temple:

“When we returned from Babylon in the time of Ezra, Israel did not return to the full glory of its past, but even so, prophecy flourished on a minor scale with Haggai, Zacharia, and Malachi. Similarly, Israel was not on the same exalted level as King Shlomo’s Temple. From all over the Land, people came to see it, but in the eyes of elders who still remembered the magnificence of the First Temple, the Second Temple seemed to be an affront. They would weep and express criticism, saying, ‘This is the Temple??’ The Prophets scolded them for this attitude, saying, ‘*Who has despised the day of small things?*’ (Zachariah, 4:10). The *Gemara* answers: ‘The small minded among them who didn’t have faith in the Almighty’ (Sotah 48B). You are disbelievers, the Prophet told them. Ezra called the exiles to come back to Zion and many didn’t listen. In our days also, there are Torah scholars and ‘*Tzaddikim*’ who criticize the Almighty for the way He is returning the Jewish People to Zion.

“Is all of this great rebuilding and renaissance of our Land mere happenstance? It is Nature’s wanton anarchy? No! This is all *Hashem*’s doing! The Prophet Isaiah exclaimed, ‘*Hear O deaf, and look O Blind, that you may see! Who is blind but My servant, or deaf as the messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the L-rd’s servant?*’ (Isaiah, 42:18-19).

“There are so many things to see and to hear! Be quiet, pensive, and listen. Then you will see the Almighty who disguises Himself in the events which unfold in the world.”

So, my dear friends, and all of my brothers and sisters, be quiet, pensive, and listen. Then you, too, will see the Almighty who disguises Himself in the events which unfold in the world, especially in the day-to-day headlines of the life of the Jewish Nation in Israel.

50 Ways to Leave Your Lover

Dear Shmuelik from Monsey,

Thank you for your comment, “Fishman may be a clever writer, but the fact is that there is no Torah obligation at this time until the *Moshiach* comes to live in the Land of Israel.”

The Torah giant, the Rambam, has established in his “Letter of Teman” that our performance of the commandments is not dependent on the *Mashiach’s* coming. We are to do all of the commandments to the best of our ability, and G-d will do what is fitting in His eyes. The Rambam writes: “However, if a man will stay in a place where he sees the Torah is waning, and where the Jewish People will be lost with the passage of time, and where he cannot stand by his faith, and say, ‘I will stay here until the *Mashiach* comes and survive where I am,’ this is nothing but an evil heart and a great loss, and a sickness of reasoning and spirit.”

In addition, the universally recognized Torah authority, the Ramban (with an N), states that the commandment to settle the Land of Israel is an obligation from the Torah, beholden on us in every generation: “In my opinion, this is a positive commandment, enjoining them that they dwell in the Land of Israel and possess it, because it was given to them, and that they should not despise the inheritance of the L-rd” (Supplement to “Sefer HaMitzvot of the Rambam,” Positive Commandment #4).

The *Gaon of Vilna* warned that the sin of the Spies in not wanting to conquer and dwell in the Land of Israel will return to haunt the nation in the time of *Mashiach*: “Many will fall in this great sin of, ‘*They despised the cherished Land.*’ Also many guardians of the Torah will not know or understand that they are caught in the sin of the Spies, that they have been drawn into the sin of the Spies by many false ideas and empty claims, and they support their claims with the already proven fallacy that the commandment to settle the Land of Israel no longer applies in our day, an opinion which has already been refuted by the Torah giants of the world, both the early and later authorities” (Kol HaTor, Ch.5).

Referring to this week’s Torah portion, “*Mishpatim*,” Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook taught an interesting lesson. “It is written that after six years, a Hebrew slave goes free. If he refuses, saying, ‘*I loved my master – I won’t go out to freedom,*’ this is an awful thing. Likewise, when a Jew falls in love with life in the exile, saying, ‘I loved my master, the foreign nation,’ this is a tragic mistake.”

We could bring a long list of Torah authorities who rule likewise. For simple people like me, it seems pretty clear that G-d wants His people back in the Land of Israel. In our times, we have witnessed the miraculous rebirth of the Jewish Nation in *Eretz Yisrael*. Who has brought all this about? Who has gathered millions of Jews from the four corners of the world in fulfillment of Biblical prophecy? Even to an eye untrained in the exegesis of Jewish law, it is obvious that G-d has decided that the time has arrived to come home. To facilitate the way, He has transformed desert and wasteland into vineyards and orchards

that now export produce to the world. G-d has built thriving cities and settlements, restored Jerusalem's beauty, led Israeli armies to victories over vastly greater forces, and jettisoned the tiny country forward in super fast-motion into becoming a world leader in medicine, science, computer technology, and just about every other field there is. And *Eretz Yisrael* is once again the Torah center of the Jewish world.

Who has done all this if not the Holy One Blessed Be He? How can anyone think that He does not want His children to return home to Israel? He has even given us a Jewish airline to bring us here in a *glatt* kosher fashion. With available apartments, and a modern economy, and millions of Jews already here, how can anyone claim that the time to return has not yet arrived?

Shmuelik, my friend, wake up! Open you eyes! The L-rd is bringing the exiles back to Zion. It is happening now. G-d hasn't waited for *Mashiach* to come. Why should you? As the song says, "Get on the bus, Gus. No need to discuss much. Just get yourself free."

Israel Wants You!

A reader writes that he won't come to live in Israel as long as the political leadership is corrupt and the Israel Defense Force is employed to expel Jews from their homes, like in the shameful evacuation from Gush Katif.

Imagine that our forefather Avraham said to G-d, "I won't come to Israel as long as there are idol worshippers in the Land."

Or if Joshua had said to G-d, "I won't bring the Jews to Israel as long as the Canaanites don't grant us permission."

Or if Yehuda the Maccabee had decided to become a Hellenized Jew because the odds of beating them in battle were nil.

The point is that we don't pick and choose what *mitzvot* we do because they are pleasing to us or not.

We don't say, "I won't put on *tefillin* because they cost too much money."

We don't say, "I won't wear *tzitzit* because they make me look funny."

Or, "I won't keep kosher because not all kosher supervision is on the level."

Or, "I won't keep the laws of family purity because I want to kiss my wife whenever I like."

Or, "I won't pray because there are people in *shul* who talk during *davening*."

We do the *mitzvot* because *Hashem* commanded us to do them. Especially when it comes to the *mitzvah* that the entire Torah is based on – the *mitzvah* of living in the Land of Israel.

Thank G-d that the brave and holy pioneers that returned to settle *Eretz Yisrael* in the last century did not say, “We won’t come as long as there are Turks, and swamps, and mosquitoes in the Land.”

More than a hundred years ago, the unsurpassed Torah giant, the *Gaon of Vilna*, sent his students to settle the Land even though the journey was filled with danger, on sea and on land. He sent them even though the Turkish rulers in Israel were corrupt.

Yes, some of the politicians leading today’s government in Israel are corrupt. But, thank G-d, there are Jews ruling here, and not Christians or Muslims. Thank G-d that G-d has brought us back to our homeland, out from the exile of foreign lands. Thank G-d that we have the opportunity to fix things that need fixing.

There’s still a lot more to do. So, come. Your talents are just what we need here. Instead of helping to build America, or England, or France, come home and help build our own Jewish homeland.

Ahavat Yisrael

Ahavat Yisrael means love for the Jewish People. I was surprised that a reader asked me to write about “*Ahavat Yisrael*.” That’s all I write about! Wanting the best for all Jews, and knowing that *Eretz Yisrael* is the optimum place for a person to draw closer to G-d, I write about the praises of *Eretz Yisrael* and the dangers of the exile in order to save fellow Jews from drowning in the Diaspora.

This same love and concern for my fellow Jews is what prompts me to write about sexual issues. The marital union is a supreme religious act, bonding a husband and wife in love and joy, and uniting all spiritual worlds. However, when it is performed in an unholy fashion, contrary to the will of the Torah, then a Jew is playing with fire.

The Land of Israel and the holiness of marital relations go hand-in-hand. This is the Covenant that G-d made with our forefather Avraham and the Jewish People. The terms of the Covenant were that G-d gave us the Land of Israel, commanding us to guard the sexual holiness of our lives, symbolized by the *brit milah*. This is the holy foundation of our nation. Our well-being in the Land of Israel depends on safeguarding the holiness of our lives. Because of the pernicious influence of the immoral Western culture which has drawn a shroud of spiritual darkness over the world, and over our Holy Land as well, this essential foundation of Judaism must be emphasized again and again to remind us that we are not like the other peoples of the planet, but, rather, the holy sons and daughters of the King, with the great privilege of living in His palace.

If reminding people of these exalted matters isn't "*Ahavat Yisrael*," then I would be happy to know what is?

Alcatraz Syndrome

In the old days when I watched movies, before I became a *baal tshuva*, I used to like prison films. A different twist on the old prison movie came to me the other day while I was reading the Torah portion. What if there was a film about a convict who had a life sentence. One day, unexpectedly, he discovers the door to his prison cell unlocked. All of the corridor doors are unlocked as well. And the main prison gate is also wide open, without a prison guard in sight. Suddenly, as he reaches the gate, he freezes. He gazes outside at the freedom before him, at the buses, the birds overhead, the pedestrians walking freely on the street. For a long moment, he stares at the beckoning yet frightening world before him. Then he does an about face, retraces his tracks, and returns to the familiar comfort of his prison cell, where all of his needs are taken care of for him - his food, lodging, work, daily exercise, even prayer.

The parable is clear. Whether it's Moscow, Boca Raton, Monsey, or Melbourne, the exile is a prison. In most of the lands of the exile today, there aren't any bars preventing the incarcerated from escaping, but they remain in exile all the same, even though the gates are wide open. Perhaps that's what makes it so difficult to leave - the fact that there aren't any visible bars and barbwire fences, so the inmates don't realize that they are incarcerated. But it is a prison all the same, more difficult to escape from than Soviet Russia, where the iron curtain was a constant reminder of the harsh imprisonment, inspiring the inmates with a yearning for freedom.

Make no mistake, my friends, exile is a prison. Being outcast from the Land of Israel is no different than sending a convict to St. Helena or Alcatraz. A Jew living in someone else's land is not a free man. His mind and values are always exposed to the foreign culture around him. He is always dependent on the gentiles who lord over him. He has no national existence as a Jew. He is always a defenseless minority, waiting for the next whack on his head.

Why was I reminded of this as I studied this week's Torah portion? Because it repeats, again and again, that a Jew is meant to live in the Land of Israel:

"Now therefore hearken, O Israel, to the statutes and to the laws which I teach you to do, that you may live and go in to POSSESS THE LAND...." (Devarim, 4:1).

"I have taught you statutes and laws that you should act accordingly IN THE LAND whither you go to possess," (Ibid, 4:5).

"And the L-rd commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and laws that you may do them IN THE LAND into which you go over to possess," (Ibid, 4:14).

"But you shall go over and possess the GOOD LAND," (Ibid, 4:22).

"Thou shall therefore keep His statutes... that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, that you may prolong thy days ON THE LAND which the L-rd your G-d gives thee" (Ibid, 4:40).

"I will speak to thee all the commandments... which thou shall teach them that they may do them IN THE LAND which I gave them to possess" (Ibid, 5:28).

“That you may prolong your days IN THE LAND which you shall possess,” (Ibid, 5:30).

“Now this is the commandment... that you may do them IN THE LAND which you go in to possess,” (Ibid, 6:1).

“That you may increase mightily IN THE LAND that flows with milk and honey,” (Ibid, 6:3).

“And thou shall do what is good and right in the sight of the L-rd, that it may be well with thee, and you will go in and possess THE GOOD LAND,” (Ibid, 6:18).

“He brought us out of Egypt that He might bring us in, to give us THE LAND which He swore to our fathers,” (Ibid, 6:22).

Because of our sins, we were exiled from our Land to the many St. Helenas and Alcatrazes around the world. For nearly 2000 years, we were imprisoned. But now, the doors of the prison are open. People have money for airplane tickets to Israel. There is a Jewish airline that serves kosher food. Apartments and villas are waiting, including beautiful cities with modern industrial parks. For those who prefer a more rural environment, there are lovely and vibrant religious settlements and *moshavim* all over the country. The Israel economy is strong. No place in the world has more Torah learning, *yeshivot*, *heders*, and *ulpanot* for girls. Not to mention Jerusalem, the Holy City of our prayers, resplendent with beauty and rebirth, the most spiritual place on earth. And there even are agencies like “Nefesh B’Nefesh” that help people make *aliyah*. Yes, freedom and change can be difficult and challenging, but millions of former prisoners have escaped their former exiles and found a wonderful new life in Israel.

The gates are open. In a wink of an eye, with a little courage and faith, you, too, can be here, a free man in the Jewish homeland. *L'hitraot!*
See you soon!

Rashi

Rashi lived one thousand years ago. He begins his famous commentary on the Torah in a startling and prophetic fashion by quoting a teaching of Rabbi Yitzhak, a teaching that shows Rashi to be a diehard Zionist.

Rabbi Yitzhak poses an interesting question. Why, he asks, does the Torah begin with the account of Creation? After all, the Torah is the book of Jewish Law. This being the case, it should begin with the first commandment that was given to the Jews. Nevertheless, he explains, the Torah begins with the story of Creation so that, in the future, when the nations of the world accuse the Jews of being robbers for having conquered the Land of Israel away from the gentiles living there, the Jews will be able to answer them that He who created the world, and parceled out its lands as He saw fit, decided to give the Land of Israel to us.

This is the answer we should give to Obama, to all the European Jew haters, and to the Arabs. The world belongs to G-d, and He gave the Land of Israel to us!

This is all well and good, but the problem is that there are many Jews in Israel whose commitment to the Land of Israel isn't what it should be. They look upon the Land of Israel as a Monopoly deed that can be bartered away for practical purposes. This sad state of affairs derives from their lack of understanding of the Torah. Rather than viewing the Land of Israel as an integral oneness, bonded with an eternal unity with the life of the Jewish Nation, they view it as some external acquisition that can be chopped into negotiable pieces. As Rabbi Kook taught:

“Eretz Yisrael is not a peripheral matter, an external acquisition of the Nation... *Eretz Yisrael* is an independent unit, bound with a living attachment to the Nation, bound up with an inner *“segulah”* with the Nation’s existence” (Orot, 1:1).

This means that just as a person needs his heart and his head to be a whole, living person, so, too, the Torah, the Jewish People, and the Land of Israel are one, in an eternal, indivisible wholeness.

Therefore, every believing Jew, no matter where he lives, should be willing to fight and die, if need be, defending the right of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel. After all, the Arabs are willing to fight and die over the Land of Israel, and it isn’t even theirs.

To preserve the wholeness of the Land of Israel, and the wholeness of the Torah, and the wholeness of the Nation of Israel, and to preserve the honor of G-d in the world, we have to actively demonstrate that we love and want the Land of Israel more than the *goyim*.

Rashi makes clear that the Land of Israel is ours. That’s the message we should tell the world. Plain and simple. If they don’t like it, let them complain to *Hashem*. But first, we have to believe it for ourselves.

Diaspora Day

I want to answer the accusation of some talkbackers who rebuke me for getting down on Diaspora Jewry. Of course, my love for the Jewish People includes Diaspora Jews. It is **precisely** out of my love for them that I have been trying to awaken them to the incomparable superiority of Jewish life in the Land of Israel.

My gripe is not with them, my brothers and sisters in the lands of our dispersal, but with the superficial understanding of Judaism that is taught throughout the Diaspora, which lauds Diaspora Judaism as an end in itself, and not what it really is - a punishment of exile in foreign lands until we return to our own Land. Instead of teaching their communities that the goal of each and every Jew should be to live a Torah life in Israel, as is explicitly expressed in our daily prayers, Jewish leaders and educators in the Diaspora work toward strengthening Jewish life in the exile itself. Because the educational goals of the Diaspora establishment are misdirected, the Jews there don't know any better. In their innocence, they believe they are doing the right thing in educating their children to become successful Americans, Frenchmen, or Australians, instead of encouraging them to build their lives in the Jewish homeland.

The truth is that Diaspora Jews are a lot stronger than I am. I can't be in the Diaspora for more than a few days before I start to feel sick. I begin to feel dizzy, confused, suffocated, as if there is no oxygen to breathe. That's because the holy air of Israel is missing. Someone who is accustomed to the holiness of the Land of Israel can actually feel the spiritual vacuum of the Diaspora if he has to travel there on a visit, or

go there on some type of *shlichut*. In contrast, the Jews who live there don't seem to be affected by the lack of holiness in their surroundings at all. They're accustomed to it. They grew up that way, and thus don't experience the difference.

So, in contrast to what my detractors maintain, I have great admiration for my brothers and sisters in the Diaspora who have the stamina to endure and survive the *galut*. They are much braver than I am. Walking the streets in the Diaspora, whether it be on Broadway, along Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, or on the Boulevard Montparnasse in gay Paree, I'm frightened to death by all the *goyim*, with their cold stares and their clean-shaven faces that remind me of statues of Roman Caesars. "Get me out of here!" I silently pray every second I'm there. "*Even though I walk through the valleys of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me,*" I repeat like a mantra, again and again and again, until I'm on the El Al flight heading back to Israel.

So, *kol hakavod, chevre!* I lift up my *kippah* to you in esteem. Your passion for Judaism is a lot stronger than mine. If I had stayed in the Diaspora like you, I would have given up Jewish observance and gone back to my old rancid ways. Your fierce attachment to Judaism, in a foreign place, in an impure environment, surrounded by a vapid, gentile culture, living in danger every minute, it's just incredible to me! How you have the fortitude and courage to observe the Jewish holidays, and walk to *shul* on *Shabbat* through Indian territory, and send your children to Jewish Day schools, it's all baffling to me. Truly, we need to establish an annual Diaspora Day to honor the Jews in the exile for keeping the flame of Judaism burning in the darkness. And yet, with all of my admiration, I still say that you'd be far better off in Israel.

Love For All

Rabbi Kook writes that the heart must be filled with love for all: for all of Creation, for all mankind, and, in ascending order, for the Jewish People, in which all other loves are included, since it is the mission of Israel to bring the world to perfection. All of these loves are to be expressed in practical action, by pursuing the welfare of those whom we are bidden to love, and to seek their betterment and advancement.

This message is especially appropriate as Tisha B'Av approaches. Our Sages teach that the Second Temple was destroyed by senseless hatred. Rabbi Kook writes that the Temple will be rebuilt through gratuitous love.

Perhaps this is a fitting time to repeat that my harsh view of Jewish life in the Diaspora does not stem from animosity toward my brothers and sisters who live there – on the contrary, it derives from a deep love and concern for their spiritual and physical welfare.

Rabbi Kook teaches that hatred may be directed only toward the evil and filth in the world. We must remember that the spark of life, in its inherent light and holiness, never leaves the divine image in which mankind was created, and with which each person and nation is endowed.

Though our love for people must be all-inclusive, embracing the wicked as well, this in no way blunts our hatred for evil itself – on the contrary, it strengthens it. “For it is not because of the dimension of evil clinging to a person that we include him in our love, but because of the good in

him, which our love tells us is to be found in everyone. Since we separate the dimension of the good in him, in order to love him for it, our hatred for the evil becomes unblunted and absolute” (Midot HaRayah, Ahavah).

Rabbi Kook continues: “It is proper to hate a corrupt person only for his defects, but insofar as he is endowed with a divine image, it is proper to love him. We must also realize that the precious dimension of his worth is a more authentic expression of his nature than the lower characteristics that developed in him through circumstances.”

To bring these lofty teachings down to earth, we can disagree with a fellow talkbacker and even despise his opinions, but we should love him all the same for his sincere and heartfelt concern for the Jewish Nation. Our love for mankind should extend to gentiles, and even Arabs, as difficult as this may be. Not to love them for the evil of their ways, which should be hated with an absolute hatred, but for the divine image that kindles in them as well.

So let’s try to be a little more tolerant of each other, and love one another, even though the things we write can make one and other ill.

Rabbi Kook on *T'shuva* and the Land of Israel

Every month of *Elul*, I try to read over Rabbi's Kook's book, "*Orot HaT'shuva*," which explores the phenomena of individual, national, and cosmic repentance, all in Rabbi's Kook's unparalleled style and Torah brilliance.

I had the great merit to co-write a commentary on "*Orot HaT'shuva*" with the noted Torah educator, Rabbi David Samson. Our book is called "*The Art of T'shuva*."

In this blog, we will present an excerpt from a chapter explaining Rabbi Kook's teachings on the connection between repentance and *Eretz Yisrael*.

Rabbi Kook teaches that *t'shuva* encompasses far more than personal repentance. The ever-streaming waves of *t'shuva* influence the world in its entirety, lifting it toward perfection. It is the Nation of Israel who will lead mankind to world repentance, when the world will come to recognize G-d and His chosen Nation, Israel.

This is all well and good. But what will bring the Jewish People, in its entirety to *t'shuva*? What will awaken the Divine voice in our national soul? What will cause the scattered, exiled Jewish Nation to return to the glorious days of our past – in fulfillment of our prayers and the words of our Prophets?

Rabbi Kook writes that the rebirth of the Jewish nation in *Eretz Yisrael* is the foundation for the ultimate *t'shuva*, both for the Nation of Israel, and for the whole world (*Orot HaT'shuva*, 17:1).

To understand this concept fully, one must understand the incomparable holiness of the Land of Israel and its importance to the Nation of Israel. While it is beyond the scope of this blog to explore this subject in depth, we will mention a few of the things which point to the unique connection between the Jewish People and their Land.

The Jewish People possess true national vitality only in the Land of Israel (Isaiah, 42:5). Outside of the Land, Jews can excel as individuals in all fields of endeavor, but the light of G-d cannot appear in a national format. Only in the Land of Israel can the Jews be a KINGDOM of priests and a holy NATION (Shemot, 19:6). The *Zohar* emphasizes that the Jews can be a nation only in Israel, and not outside of it (Zohar, Vayikra, 93B). Prophecies of redemption all involve the return of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel and the restoration of Jewish sovereignty over the Land (Ezekiel, 37:21-22). The Jewish People's unique prophetic talent is dependent on being in the Land of Israel (Kuzari, 2:8-24). The Temple can only be rebuilt in Jerusalem, and the full revelation of G-d's Presence, the *Shechinah*, is exclusive to *Eretz Yisrael*, as the prophet teaches, *"For Torah will go forth from Zion, and the word of the L-rd from Jerusalem"* (Isaiah, 2:3).

In a letter, Rabbi Kook wrote:

"The source of the moral baseness which continues to darken the world stems from the lack of recognition regarding the value and wisdom of the Land of Israel. Thus the sin of the Spies, who spoke derogatorily about the pleasant Land, remains uncorrected. To rectify this, the Land's praise, splendor, holiness, and honor must be declared to all the world" (Letters, Vol.1, Pgs. 112-113).

While Rabbi Kook emphasizes that the *t'shuva* of the Jewish People and a return to the Torah go hand-in-hand, he indicates that a preliminary stage of national revival will bring this spiritual awakening to pass. First, the Jewish people must return to Zion to rebuild their homeland. Once the physical body that houses the nation is built, then the revitalized Jewish soul will yearn for spiritual completion as well, and our people will flock back to the Torah.

The concept of *t'shuva* means to return. Suppose a man is expelled from his house by thieves. The wrongdoing will only be corrected when the original owner returns to repossess his house. The same is true for the Jewish People as a whole.

For the world to reach perfection, G-d decreed that the Jewish People must live a life of Torah in Israel. G-d's first commandment to Abraham is to go to the Land of Israel in order to serve G-d in the most complete way (Bereshit, 12:1). Afterwards, G-d commands Moshe to bring the Jews out from Egypt to *Eretz Yisrael*. Over and over, the Torah repeats that the Jewish people are to live their unique Torah life in Israel. When the holy Jewish Nation lives a holy life of Torah in the Holy Land, the vessel is formed to bring the light of G-d to the world. The Nation of Israel becomes an international beacon, an example and light to all of the nations in the world (Isaiah, 42:6).

At the time of the Second Temple, when we failed to uphold the high moral standard demanded of us by the Torah, we were punished and exiled from the Land. G-d's worldly vessel was shattered. Israel was conquered, Jerusalem was razed, the Land was laid waste. G-d's chosen people were scattered and debased. Like the Jews, G-d's Presence went

into exile. His light in the world became hidden. In effect, mankind was cut off from G-d. Thus, to rectify this tragedy, and return the world to G-d, the Nation of Israel must return to their previous stature, including a national life in Israel, the only place in the world where the Torah can be observed in all of its wholeness, because of the many precepts unique to the Land.

Each Jew has a bit of the *Shechinah*, or the Presence of G-d, within him. When a Jew returns to the Land of Israel, he is, in effect, bringing G-d back with him (Rashi, Devarim,30:3). This is the Kabbalistic concept of “raising up the buried sparks of holiness from the *kelipot*.” Since the soul of a Jew is infused with the light of the *Shechinah*, when the Jewish people return en masse to Israel, the light of G-d in the world returns with them. The nations of the world see with their own eyes that the prophecies in the Bible are true. Accompanying this great ingathering is the miraculous rejuvenation of the Land and the incredible rebuilding of the Nation of Israel in every field and endeavor.

There are religious Jews who say that this certainly cannot be the long-awaited Redemption because of its secular nature, but Rabbi Kook teaches that in the return of the nonreligious Zionists to Israel there is a profound holy core. The inner source of their desire to return is the Divine Ideal itself. At first, it is a call toward Jewish nationalism which motivates them, but this is also *t’shuva*, and with time, it will surely be awakened and actualized in their return to the Torah as well. This great transformation may take 100 years. It may 200. We need to remember that after nearly two-thousand years in exile, a few generations is like the blink of an eye. The important thing to know is that the *t’shuva* of the nation is sure to come to pass (Rambam, Laws of *T’shuva*, 7:5).

Thus, Rabbi Kook writes:

“The awakened yearning of the Jewish People as a whole to return to their Land, to their roots, to their spirit and way of life — truthfully, there is the light of *t’shuva* in this” (Orot HaT’shuva, 17:2).

The book of Ezekiel includes an overview of Jewish history which traces Israel’s exile among the gentile nations, and our ultimate return to the Land of Israel and Torah. Only after the nation’s physical revival in Israel do the Jewish people undergo the period of spiritual cleansing which leads them back to Torah:

“For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all countries, and I will bring you into your own Land. Then I will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you shall be clean; from all of your uncleannesses, and from all of your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart will I also give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My spirit in you, and cause you to follow My statutes, and you shall keep My judgments and do them. And you shall dwell in the Land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be My people, and I shall be your G-d” (Ezekiel, 36:24-28).

The return to our true national identity, and the spiritual revolution which follows, encompasses all aspects of Jewish life. This great return, while still in its nascent stages, is something we have witnessed in our time. First, out of the graveyards of exile, came a new hope and zest for life, as if our scattered, dry bones were rising to rebirth, in fulfillment of Biblical prophecy (Ezekiel, 37:1-14). Out of the ashes of the Holocaust, the Jewish nation was reborn in Israel. The Hebrew language was

restored. After two-thousand years of wandering, the Jews returned to being an independent Nation in our own Land. An incredible, new awakening of Jewish valor and physical prowess, epitomized by the Israel Defense Forces, startled the world. The ingathering of exiles from the four corners of the earth led to the building of a dynamic, progressive society. Yeshivas were opened all over the country. Today, Israel is unquestionably the Torah center of the world. All of these things are aspects of national *t'shuva*, of a Nation returning to its roots.

As Rabbi Kook writes:

“Without question, the light of *Mashiach*, and the salvation of Israel, the rebirth of the Nation and the Land, the revival of its language and literature — all stem from the source of *t'shuva* , and everything will be brought out of the depths to the heights of the highest *t'shuva* ” (Orot Ha'Tshuva, 4:11).

The return of a scattered people to its Land is no simple matter. Because of the magnitude of the undertaking, there are numerous problems. Nonetheless, Rabbi Kook assures us that our inner longing for G-d will overcome all of the barriers. Even the brazen secularism, which seems so contrary to the nation's holiest goals, will become a powerful vessel bursting with Torah.

“Out of the profane, holiness will also come forth, and out of wanton freedom, the beloved yoke (of Torah) will blossom. Golden chains will be woven and arise out of secular poetry, and a brilliant light of *t'shuva* will shine from secular literature. This will be the supreme wonder of the vision of redemption. Let the bud sprout, let the flower blossom, let the fruit ripen, and the whole world will know that the Spirit of G-d is

speaking within the Nation of Israel in its every expression. All of this will climax in a *t'shuva* which will bring healing and redemption to the world" (Ibid, 17:3).

Indeed, the revival of the Jewish Nation in Israel is a wonder that is impossible to explain in any mundane fashion. Clearly, there are powerful inner forces at work as we return to our homeland.

Increasingly sensitized to our own national longings, we realize that gentile lands cannot be called home. The process takes time. The nation is not transformed overnight. But gradually, the curse of exile in foreign lands is erased. From being a scattered people, the Jewish Nation returns to have its own sovereign state. G-d's blessing is revealed in all facets of the nation's existence; military success, economic prosperity, scientific achievement, the resettlement of the nation's ancient cities and holy cities — all leading to a great national *t'shuva*, the renewal of prophecy, and, of course, the return of the Divine Presence to the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem, in fulfillment of our daily *Amidah* prayer.

Rabbi Kook explains that the secular, physical rebuilding must necessarily precede the spiritual building. The Talmud teaches that the *Beit HaMikdash* (Jerusalem Temple) was first constructed in a normal, profane manner, and only after its completion was its sanctity declared (Me'ilah 14A). First, Adam was created from the dust of the earth, and then the soul was placed within him. So, too, a Jewish youth only becomes responsible to keep the Torah at the age of thirteen - after his body and mind have developed in strength. This is the pattern of spiritual building; first comes the physical vessel, and then its inner content. First the ark is constructed, and then the Tablets are placed

within (see Rashi, Shemot, 38:22).

It must be remembered that the Zionist movement did not begin with Herzl, but rather with the giants of Torah, the *Baal Shem Tov* and the *Gaon of Vilna*, more than a hundred years earlier. The *Gaon of Vilna* (also known as the *Gra*) sent his students to settle *Eretz Yisrael*, teaching them that the active resettlement of the Land was the path to bring the long-awaited redemption (see the book, “*Kol HaTor*”). Other great Rabbis, Rav Tzvi Hirsh Kalisher, Rav Eliyahu Guttmacher, and Rav Shmuel Mohliver were the actual builders of the early Zionist groups like the “Lovers of Zion.” As the movement spread, its message attracted many non-religious Jews as well. Rabbi Kook explains that the newcomers embraced the call to Zion in a way which fit their own understandings, national aspirations, and dreams. While this temporarily lowered the loftiness of the message, it insured the necessary first stage of physical rebuilding:

“Occasionally, a concept falls from its loftiness and its original pureness after it has been grounded in life when unrefined people become associated with it, darkening its illumination. The descent is only temporary because an idea which embraces spiritual goodness cannot be transformed into evil. The descent is passing, and it is also a bridge to an approaching ascent” (Orot HaT’shuva, 12:12).

The original, pure, lofty idea of Zionism, as handed down by our Sages, is that the revival of the Jewish nation in Israel is the earthly foundation for the revelation of the Kingdom of G-d in the world. For the secular Zionists, the return to Israel became something else. For some, the Land of Israel was merely a refuge from the persecutions of the

gentiles. For others, it was a place to build a utopian socialist society. Because of their large numbers, the influence of the secular Zionists was widespread. Additionally, Rabbi Kook explains, the secular Jews were more suited to the task of settling the barren, swamp-ridden land. The religious Jews of the time lived in a spiritual world, having little contact with earthly matters. The physical sides of their natures were neglected and weak. The secular Jews, on the other hand, had an abundance of physical energy and prowess, along with the subsequent “will and desire to work and achieve, to carry out one’s goal through physical force and concrete endeavor” (Ibid, 12:13).

Rabbi Kook explains that when a holy idea needs to be grounded in reality, it necessarily descends from its exalted elevation. When this happens, people of lesser spiritual sensitivities seize the idea and profane its true intent. Because greater numbers of people can grasp the idea in its minimized form, its followers increase, bringing more strength and vigor to its practical implementation. This trend continues until powerful spiritual figures arise, girded with the strength of Divine righteousness. They grasp the idea in its original purity and hold it aloft, rescuing it from the depths where it had plunged, stripped of its holiness and spiritual splendor. As a result of this new infusion of light, the original idea is resurrected in all of its majesty and power. All who embrace it are elevated with its ascent. Even those who attached themselves to the idea in its fallen state are raised up, and they are inspired to a powerful, lofty *t’shuva* .

“This process will surely come about. The light of G-d, which is buried away in the fundamental point of Zion, and which is now concealed by clouds, will surely appear. From the lowly valley, it will raise up G-d’s

Temple and Kingdom and all of its branches. All those who cling to it, the near and the distant, will be uplifted with it, for a true revival and an everlasting salvation” (Ibid, 12:12).

At the turn of this century, as the Zionist movement grew in influence and attracted more and more followers, many religious Jews rose up in protest. In their eyes, the movement to resettle the Land of Israel was brazenly secular, even defiant of Torah. While Rabbi Kook exhorted the pioneers to return to a sanctified life of Torah, he saw the inner source and positive side of their courageous endeavor. The return of the Nation to Israel was in itself a great, holy act. Simply because they were Jews, in the depths of their proud Jewish souls, the Zionists also shared the yearning for a full Jewish life (Orot, 2:8). Their scorn of the commandments was a blemish that was destined to heal.

Rabbi Kook’s deep spiritual insight did not blind him to the unholy lifestyles of the secular pioneers. However, he knew that the holy essence of *Am Yisrael* guaranteed that the Nation would return to its roots. Long before the establishment of the State of Israel, Rabbi Kook described this process in almost prophetic terms:

“We recognize that a spiritual rebellion will come to pass in *Eretz Yisrael* amongst the People of Israel in the beginnings of the Nation’s revival. The material comfort which will be attained by a percentage of the Nation, convincing them that they have already completely reached their goal, will constrict the soul, and days will come which will seem to be devoid of all spirit and meaning. The aspirations for lofty and holy ideals will cease, and the spirit of the Nation will plunge and sink low until a storm of rebellion will appear, and people will come to see

clearly that the power of Israel lies in its eternal holiness, in the light of G-d and His Torah, in the yearning for spiritual light which is the ultimate valor, triumphing over all of the worlds and all of their powers” (Orot, pg.84, paragraph 44).

In another essay, Rabbi Kook writes:

“Our Nation will be built and reestablished; all of its foundations will return to their full might, through the reactivating, strengthening, perfection, and spreading of its faith, its Divine inner holiness, and its reverence of G-d. All of the Nation’s builders will come to recognize this truth. Then with a mighty, valorous voice, they will call out to themselves and to their brethren, ‘Let us come and return to the L-rd.’ And this will be a true return. It will be a *t’shuva* filled with valor, a *t’shuva* which will give strength and vigor to all of the Nation’s spiritual and physical aspects, to all of the endeavors needed for the building and perfection of the people, inspiring it to rebirth and to stability. The Nation’s eyes will be opened, its soul will be cleansed, its light will shine, its wings will spread, a reborn Nation will arise, a great, awesome, and numerous people, filled with the light of G-d and the majesty of nationhood. *‘Behold, the people shall rise up like a great lion, and like a young lion, it shall lift itself up.’*” (BaMidbar, 23:24; Orot Ha’Tshuva, 15:11).

It can be seen that the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel is a necessary stage in the *t’shuva* of the nation. It follows that a Jew who becomes a baal *t’shuva* in Chicago has only returned a part of the way home. While his personal character and behavior have been purified by the light of the Torah, he has traveled only half of the

journey. The *t'shuva* train is continuing on to Israel. The final stop is Jerusalem. Every Jew needs to bring his little light home to the Holy Land where it can join the great flame. He has to raise up his private, individual life, to the higher life of the *Clal*, to merge his personal goals with the goals of the Israeli Nation. To rectify the blemish caused by *galut*, he has to stop being in exile and join the ingathered. He has to actualize the words of his prayers, *"And gather us together from the four corners of the earth."*

May it be soon.

Holocaust in America

Nothing better expresses the inner unity of the Jews of Israel than the two long, heart-wrenching minutes, when sirens blare all of the country and people stop what they are doing, cars, buses, pedestrians, bicycles riders, office workers, to stand in frozen tribute to the 6 million Jews who perished in the Holocaust.

Why don't the Jews of America all stand in silence at the very same moment? Not only because of the past. Because of the Holocaust that is happening in America today. The Nazis killed 6 million. Since the end of World War Two, assimilation in America has wiped out even more. Not to mention the same devastating Holocaust in England, France, Australia, and wherever Jews live outside of the Land of Israel.

Face it. What's the difference between the blue eyes of the Nazi exterminator and the blue eyes of the forbidden Brigitte? Only the means of slaughter. The outcome is the same whether via the gas chamber of a Nazi death camp or the crematorium of Brigitte's embrace – Jews and Jewish children are slaughtered.

Sure, Cindy had a Conservative conversion, and Samantha lights the Sabbath candles, and little Moshie and Sarala go to Hebrew school, but it's all a charade. Cindy and Samantha are not Jews. Little Moshie and Sarala aren't Jews either.

Wake up Jews of America! Wake up Jews all over the world! Today, the gentiles are too embarrassed by gas chambers. Today they are killing us with pseudo acceptance and love. Don't be fooled by her blond hair, her flashing smile, her blue Eichmann eyes, leading you and your children to the slaughter. Like the Torah warns, *"Don't bow down to*

their gods and sacrifice your seed to Molech,” meaning don’t chase after their women and sacrifice your seed to Brigitte, who annihilates your Jewish seed in the crematorium of her love. Don’t bow down to their customs, their languages, their pornographic cultures, their narcissistic values and ways, just to be welcomed in their treacherous lying embrace.

Yes, my dear friends, Israel is the only refuge. In one fashion or another, Jewish life in the Diaspora is doomed. Maybe you yourself will get by before the disaster comes, but if you really care about your children, and their children after them, start planning your *aliyah* now.

And the Winner is....

Tzvi Fishman!!!!

That's right, friends. At last night's Oscars, the biggest winner of them all was Tzvi Fishman!

Huh? How can that be, you ask?

I'll tell you, my friends. Tzvi was the biggest winner of the evening, precisely because he didn't win anything at all!

If he had won, he'd be there now, grinning away in his tuxedo, surrounded by a galaxy of flashing light bulbs, signing new deals, clinking champagne glasses with fellow stars, while rubbing elbows and shoulders with all of the Hollywood Hookers in their tempting see-through gowns.

Here's his acceptance speech, in case you missed it:

"I would like to thank the members of the Academy for having forgotten about me completely. Thank You, *Hashem*, for having plucked me out of a land where the most vaunted prize is a statue of gold, and for having brought me to the Land of Israel, where the greatest prize is a life of Torah in the Holy Land, where a Jew can be true to himself without dressing up in a bowtie and tuxedo and grinning like a *goy* in order to prove that he's just like everyone else. Thank You, *Hashem*, for making me the biggest winner of them all!"

There But For the Grace of G-d

Yesterday, I was shooting the breeze with a friend, reminiscing about old times, when he told me about his family and cronies back in America.

His brother married a non-Jewish girl. To placate his distressed parents, they arranged for a Conservative “conversion,” and they go through the motions of celebrating some holidays, but his brother rarely visits Israel, and his nephews have no interest at all in Judaism or Israel.

His sister married a Christian turned scientologist, and they disappeared into the prairies west of the Rocky Mountains, only getting in touch with his parents when they run out of funds.

His two cousins on his father’s side of the family all married gentiles. They don’t belong to any Jewish movement at all, and things like *brit milah* and *bar mitzvahs* are not even mentioned.

Miraculously, one of his cousins on his mother’s side married a Jew, but they got divorced after a few years, and he remarried a Protestant librarian. Another cousin is a homosexual who never married. And the girl of the family has already chewed up and spit out three former husbands, all of them gentiles of one form or another. Needless to say none of his cousins ever visited Israel.

Out of all of his second cousins, to the best of his knowledge, not one of them married a Jew, and none ever visited the Holy Land.

When it comes to his old Jewish buddies, his best friend from high school married a gentile and he believes liberally in all religions and creeds. His longtime roommate from college, a varsity tennis player,

married a *shiksa* cheerleader who left him with a bad case of venereal disease when she took off with one of her old football jocks. Another dear Jewish friend married a well-meaning Barbi who is gung-ho on raising their two gentile kids Jewish, with bar *mitzvahs* and trips to Israel to boot.

So whenever I hear that America is a great place for Jews, I cry. The truth is, it's a total wipeout. By and large, the Orthodox are getting by in their little Jewish bubbles, not seeming to be able to do very much to save their brethren on the other side of town.

At least in Israel, no matter how far someone is from the religion, he or she marries a Jew. There are exceptions here and there, but they don't even reach one percent. At least in this respect, it's a good thing that the Arabs hate us. That way, even the most vocal lefties don't end up marrying them. In contrast, in the Diaspora, wherever the Jews are "accepted," they're being literally loved to death.

How thankful I am that *Hashem* miraculously saved me from the same ignoble fate. As the old saying says, "There, but for the grace of G-d, go I."

The World's Holiest Bagel

More than the Jews have kept the tradition of eating bagels, bagels have kept the Jews following Jewish traditions. In effect, the bagel is a miniature lifesaver, reminding a Jew, wherever he may live, and however assimilated he may be, that he is a Jew. In fact, the bagel has done more for keeping our people Jewish than all of the Jewish Federations, Birthright programs, and Chabad Houses in the world.

The very first Jew to eat a bagel was our forefather, Avraham, as is written in the Torah, *"And Avraham hastened into the tent to Sarah and said, 'Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead it, and make cakes,'" (Bereshit, 18:6).* In my opinion, those cakes were bagels. In fact, Avraham's famous *"eshel,"* the hospitality tent he opened in Beer Sheva, was the world's first bagel joint. His tent featured 27 different types and flavors of bagels, including rye, pumpernickel, sesame, falafel, shwarma, gefilta fish, and special unleavened bagels for *Pesach*.

And now ladies and gentlemen, for the best news of all. No more excuses for not coming on *aliyah*! No more shall the complaint be heard, "You can't get a good bagel in Israel!" It's simply not true. It's liable. It's slander of the Land!

I know that I myself, in the past, have written about Israeli bagels in a pejorative light, but yesterday, I was driving through the Ramat Eshkol neighborhood in Jerusalem when a sign caught my eye. "Sam's Bagels." Curious, I parked the car and went to have a look.

"Hey!" the manager called out as I was glancing at the assortment of colorful and mouth-watering spreads. "You're Tzvi Fishman! I love your

blog! It's the first thing I look at in the morning! It puts a smile on my face the whole day. Please – have a bagel on the house!”

I don't know if he piled on the cream cheese because he knew who I was, but there was enough of it to cover Mount Everest under mounds of creamy white snow. The lox was so fresh, the generous swarm of slices seemed to be still swimming in the ice-cold waters off the banks of Norway. And the onions made my eyes open so wide I had to put on sunglasses. It was the best bagel I had ever eaten in my life!

Now, I've traveled around a little in my time. New York, LA, Las Vegas, Chicago, Miami Beach, London, Paris, San Juan, you name it. Take it from me, “Sam's Bagel” in Jerusalem serves the most delicious bagel I have ever tasted!

Now, I don't mean to imply anything negative about the other bagels restaurants in Israel – G-d forbid! It may very well be that the “Holy Bagel” chain has bagels that are even better. I just happened to pass by Sam's joint and my curiosity led me to this historic revelation.

In fact, I am so certain that Sam serves the best bagel in the world (with a wide variety of flavors as well) that I am willing, *blee nader*, to return the money of anyone who comes on *aliyah* and isn't satisfied with his first bagel experience in Jerusalem at “Sam's Bagel.” How's that for an offer?!

So no more excuses! Now you can live in Israel and still enjoy the world's oldest Jewish pacifier as well. Not only do we have the *Kotel* here, and more Torah than anywhere else in the world, from this time forth, we have the best bagels as well!!!!!!

Don't Let Santa Fool You

A friend in New York says it's beginning to look a lot like Xmas. Just so the jolly little elves and white-bearded Santas don't fool you, it pays to recall the truth about Christianity.

During the midst of World War 1, Rabbi Kook understood that Christianity was to blame for all the slaughter:

“The moral repression found in the profane culture which exerted vast dominion over the nations, brought oppression to their hearts, and caused evil traits, diseases, and anger to multiply and be pent up in the depths of their souls. And now these are erupting their fetters through the horrendously bloody and awesomely cruel wars, which are more in keeping with their still unrefined natures” (Orot, 2:4).

Rabbi Kook comes to explain how an enlightened, industrialized, and cultured Europe could unleash such destructive barbaric forces that brought the world to war. What went wrong?

The “profane culture” he writes about which has come to dominate Western civilization is the outgrowth of Christianity, whose doctrines of repression have now burst through Christianity's outer guise of gentility and brotherhood in a monstrous storm of violence and hate. This is because, in denying the Torah and its commandments, Christianity separated mankind from G-d. Unlike the constant self-correction and moral improvement demanded by the Torah, through the hard work of perfecting character traits, Christianity's false show of morals proved impotent in uplifting man's baser traits. Only the Torah has the unique power to refine man's nature. All other disciplines, whether religious,

secular, or philosophical, can add to man's quantitative knowledge, but they cannot effect any inner change.

Christian civilization, and the profane secular culture which grew out from it, knows what is evil, but does not know how to correct it. It learned about morals from the Hebrew Bible, but in cutting itself off from Israel and the commandments of the Torah, requiring only a statement of belief in their false messiah, it separated mankind from the one and only path to G-d and true morality. It left man simmering in darkness in a cauldron of unrefined passions and lusts which finally exploded in the devastating world wars of the previous century.

Judaism, in contrast, presents a practical path and down-to-earth guidance to character perfection. Our Sages teach us how to actualize the proper *midot* (character traits) in our lives, defining the measure of each and every trait, and their proper time and place. For example, in his "Introduction to the Mishna," the Rambam presents his famous doctrine of "the Middle Path," whereby man reaches a balance between the extremes, not repressing his baser emotions like lust and cruelty, but learning to give each emotion its proper expression in the proper time and place, so that sexuality becomes a holy union between man and wife, and cruelty is called upon when uprooting the wicked from the world.

"*L'havdil*" a thousand thousands of differences, Christianity, under a guise of holiness, condemns man's natural passions from birth. But mankind cannot adhere to the repression of character traits that Christianity imposes, because it does not provide man with a true means to holiness and moral refinement. Cut off from the Torah,

Christianity breeds a culture which dooms man to guilt, aggression, and a festering rage which explodes in violence and war.

Inevitably, the target of the world's murderous rage turns against the Jews. Behind the hatred for Israel lies the recognition that it was the Jewish People who introduced a moral framework to the world. Cut off from the true word of G-d, mankind remains in its barbaric state. The Divine moral message of Israel is received as an obligation and burden. Mankind wants to wallow in an uninhibited sensual and material lifestyle. The Jewish People get in their way by reminding the world of G-d and the allegiance due Him. Unable to kill the beasts within themselves, the gentiles resort to killing the Jews.

Although Rabbi Kook was unequivocal in his condemnation of Christianity, it is important to note that he never encouraged open conflict with its doctrines. He advocated that other religions be enlisted in the universal task of leading the world to G-d:

“As to alien faiths, I will tell you my opinion, that it is not the goal of Israel to uproot and destroy them, just as we do not aim for the general destructions of the nations, but rather for their correction and elevation, the removal of their dross, that they will link themselves with the source of Israel, where dew drops of light and blessing will fall over them, as it says, ‘I will take away the blood from out of his mouth, and his detestable things from between his teeth, and he, too, shall remain for our G-d’” (Zechariah, 9:7. See “Letters of Rabbi Kook” 112).

Only in the near future, when Israel's light shines in its full glory from the Land of Israel, will the nations realize that the only true enlightenment is not in Santas and snow-flaked fairy tales from

Bethlehem, but in the truth of Israel, and then they will rush gladly to the L-rd's House in Jerusalem to learn the ways of Jacob, and *"They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore"* (Isaiah, 2:2-4).

May it be soon.

Twas the Night before *Hanukah*

**Twas the night before *Hanukah*, when all through the house,
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.
The latkes were laid out on the table with care,
In hopes that *Moshiach* soon would be there.**

**The children were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads.
And mamma in her kerchief, and I in my *yarmulke* cap,
Had just settled into bed for a long winter's nap.**

**When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.**

**The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow
Gave the luster of midday to objects below.
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer.**

**With a little old driver, so lively and quick,
I knew in a moment it must be *Moshiach*.
More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name!**

**"Who is it? Who is it?" my wife wanted to know.
"*Moshiach*," I told her, trembling with fear.
"Wake the children!" I urged. "Hurry and hide them! Don't stall!"
"Now dash away! Dash away! Dash away all!"**

**“He’s come to take us away to the Land of Israel,” I said.
“Isn’t that what we pray for?” she asked, her faced flushed and red.
“What?! And give up all that we have? Are you nuts?!”
“Hide the kids in the basement. Now! Without any buts!”**

**And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.
As I crawled under the bed, and was turning around,
Down the chimney *Moshiach* came with a bound.**

**He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot.
A bundle of Jews he had flung over his back,
And he looked like a peddler, just opening his pack.**

**My heart was beating so fast, I thought I’d have an attack!
As he went about, looking for Jews he could put in his sack.
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow.**

**“Wake up! Wake up from your slumber!” he called.
If you don’t come now, you’re gonna be mauled!”
He had a broad face and a little round belly,
That shook when he laughed, like a bowl of gefilta-fish jelly.**

**He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
But I peed in my pants in spite of myself!
“You’ll all be sorry!” he called, shaking his fist.
Then, with a grunt, I saw him cross our names off his list.**

**"You forgot to place Jerusalem above your highest joy."
"So your children will grow up to marry some goy."
"You had your chance, but I can't waste my time and delay."
"Stay here with your bagels and money and continue to pray."**

**He spoke nothing more, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings with bagels, then turned with a jerk.
And holding up his finger by his big Jewish nose,
He gave a nod, and up the chimney he rose!**

**He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, 'ere he drove out of sight,
"Happy exile to all, and to all a good-night!"**

Chofetz Chaim on Aliyah

A talkbacker asked if it is halachically permissible to move to Israel when you know that you will be putting yourself in danger, because of the constant state of war there with the Arabs?

Firstly, terrorism is no stranger to the Diaspora as well. Furthermore, in light of the growing rate of assimilation, every Jew outside of Israel must consider what the future holds for himself and his children. But you've listened to my views enough. Let's have someone else answer the question.

The Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaCohen, from Radin, was certainly one of the greatest Torah scholars of modern times. His [SP8] unparalleled halachic work, the "*Mishna Berura*," is the definitive compendium of Jewish law. In addition, his writings on good deeds and kindness, "*Ahavat Chesed*," and his treatises on the evils of *Lashon Hara*, the "*Chofetz Chaim*" and "*Shmirat HaLashon*," show his great piety and saintliness. He is known never to have spoken unfairly about anyone.

The following story is brought down by the revered Rabbi Dichovsky, of blessed memory, in his book, "*Neot Desha*." In the introduction, he recounts his visit to the Chofetz Chaim in order to ask him this very same question about moving to Israel at a time of clear and present danger.

We quote:

“I saw it proper to record a statement made to me by the most pious **of** all **of** the *Cohanim*, the Rabbi **of** all **Israel**, the glory **of** the generation, the holy **of** all **Israel**, may he be blessed **in** memory, **in** the matter **of** *aliyah*. I asked him about this question, and the following **ing** are the details **of** our encounter.

“It was the beginning **of** the year, 1933. There was a group **of** Torah scholars who had organized themselves to go together to **Israel** to learn Torah. I, too, was amongst them, but I had many doubts, because I knew that many **of** the great *gedolim* (leading Torah scholars) **of** **Israel** were opposed. The heads **of** my Yeshiva were especially opposed to the idea that Yeshiva students would go to *Eretz Yisrael*, even for the sake **of** studying Torah. They said that the proper conditions had not as yet been established **in** order to facilitate Torah study with the proper diligence **in** the Holy Land, to the extent that we are able to study Torah **in** the Yeshivot **in** the Diaspora. Therefore, I said **in** my heart, that I must not ask my rabbis **in** this matter, for obviously the answer will be no.

“Like Rabbi Zera, who ran away from his teacher, Rav Yehuda, when he wanted to make *aliyah* to **Israel** (Tractate Ketubot 110B), I decided to go and ask the counsel **of** the righteous man **of** our generation, our revered rabbi, and to receive his blessing **ing** before I departed. Therefore, just before the Day **of** Atonement, I journeyed to the yeshiva **of** the Chofetz Chaim **in** the town **of** Radin, where I stayed **in** the shadow **of** this great, righteous individual. This was, as is known, the last *Yom Kippur* **of** this special *Tzaddik*, for at the end **of** the year, **in** the month

of Elul, he was taken to the Yeshiva Above, may his merit be a shield to us and all **Israel**.

“**In** spite **of** his great physical weakness, a Heavenly Providence was with me, and I merited to see him the day after *Yom Kippur*. I told him my situation, and that I had a good chance **of** making *aliyah* to **Israel** as a Torah student, only I had **lingering** doubts if I would be able to learn Torah with the same diligence with which I was learning now. Immediately, he answered, **in** his famous sweetness **of** speech, that there was no room at all for my worry. Why **in** the world would I not be able to learn Torah there with absolute diligence – just the opposite would seem to be true, for the Land **of Israel**, without question, was more conducive for steadfast immersion **in** Torah. He recited the verse, ‘The gold **of** the Land is good,’ (Bereshit, 2:12) on which the *Midrash* says, ‘This reference (the gold **of** the Land is good) are referring to the words **of** Torah, for there is no Torah like the Torah **of** Eretz **Yisrael**; and there is no wisdom like the wisdom **of** Eretz **Yisrael**.’ (Bereshit Raba, 16:7)

“Before I could express the rest **of** the doubts that I harbored - especially the fear **of** the **danger in Israel** because **of** the children **of** Ishmael who were marauding violently against the Jews, for only a few years had passed **since** the end **of** the Hebron Massacre **in** the year 1929, which made clear to everyone the wild, bestial nature **of** the Ishmaelites, who with savagery and unbounded cruelty massacred Yeshiva students and showed no mercy even to the women and children - before I was able to confess all **of** my apprehensions, the Rabbi answered the question himself.

“In the following words of Torah, he said: ‘The holy Torah tells us regarding Ishmael that he is a ‘Pere Adam,’ a wild beast of a man. It is known that our Torah is eternal, and if it says about Ishmael that he is a wild beast of a man, then Ishmael will remain forever a wild beast of a man. Even if all of the cultured nations of the world will gather together and try to educate Ishmael and transform him into a cultured individual, so that he will no longer be a wild beast of a man, obviously this will be impossible in every fashion or form. They will not be able to do this through any means whatsoever, because he is not capable of being a cultured individual, for behold, the Torah testified regarding him that he is a wild beast of a man. This means that forever, for all eternity, Ishmael is by definition a wild beast of a man. Even if Ishmael will be involved in intellectual endeavor, like being a lawyer, or some similar profession, then he will be a beastly lawyer. If he will study diligently to be a professor, then he will be a beastly professor. This means that the bestiality of Ishmael will never cease.’

“Then the Chofetz Chaim let out a long, painful sigh and said, ‘Who knows what this wild beast of a man is capable of perpetrating against the Jewish people in the end of days?’

“Concluding his words to me, he said, ‘Nevertheless, fear not – there is no reason for this to prevent you from making aliyah to the Land of Israel.’

“Then he blessed me, saying, ‘Go in peace, and the L-rd will bless your path.’

“So I left him, and journeyed **in** peace to the Holy Land.”

And so shall you.

We Want to Stay in Egypt!

In the past, we wrote that Jews in the Diaspora have a distorted understanding of Judaism. Since this statement triggered some backlash, I'd like to explain in a bit more depth.

Perhaps "distorted" is not the right word. Maybe I should have said that Diasporinians (like Floridians) have a "mistaken" understanding of Judaism, or that they live a "truncated" Judaism, or that they have been "improperly taught" what Judaism is all about.

For instance, everyone readily understands that there are levels of measurement and performance. Some people have a higher IQ than others. Some people are stronger than others. Some cars can drive faster than others. There is Major League Baseball and there is the Little League. There are magnificent championship golf courses and there is miniature golf.

In the same way, there is a difference between the Judaism of the exile and the Judaism of *Eretz Yisrael*. Not only quantitatively, in the greater number of *mitzvot* a person can perform in the Land of Israel, but also qualitatively, in a deeper understanding of what Torah is all about. A Jewish person receives this enlightened perspective when he studies the Torah in the proper fashion.

Let me cite an example that I've mentioned in the past, especially for the benefit of new readers. Once, I was in the city of Toronto to raise money for a *kiruv* program in Israel. Invited to speak at a large Orthodox synagogue, I arrived early and had time to browse through the local Jewish weekly. On the cover was a big picture of the skyline of Toronto. The headline read: "Looking Forward to the Next Decade of

Jewish Life in Toronto.” I took the newspaper into the auditorium and held it up for everyone to see.

“What is going on here?” I asked in amazement. “Everything I learn says that a Jew is supposed to look forward to the next decade of Jewish life in Jerusalem. I have a feeling that if the *Mashiach* were to come today, he would spoil your plans.”

The point is that when a person has the proper understanding of Judaism, he, or she, longs to live a life of Torah in the Land of Israel. He longs for Redemption from exile; he longs for the ingathering of the exiles to Israel; he longs to take a part in the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the renaissance of the Nation of Israel in its Land, just as we request in our prayers three times a day. This is the whole direction and goal of the Torah. Without it, Judaism is a dry, lifeless, miniature version of the real thing. No matter how pleasant the Jewish community in Toronto may be, it’s not the real thing.

Of course, throughout the long and painful generations that we were outcast from our Land, the Judaism of the exile was all that we had and its value was beyond all measure, preserving the Nation and its sacred heritage until the time arrived when we could return. But now that we can come home, why linger on?

This isn’t a new phenomenon. In the upcoming Torah portions, Rashi will reveal that eighty percent of the Jews refused to leave Egypt for the Land of Israel. Subsequently, they were punished with death in the three days of darkness, so that the Egyptians wouldn’t mock G-d when they saw that 80% of His People preferred to stay in Egypt rather than leaving it for the Promised Land. A whopping 80% of the Jews in Egypt

didn't understand that building a Torah society in the Land of Israel was what Judaism is all about.

Let me cite another example. Once, I was in Boca Raton visiting my parents before they made *aliyah*. Entering a synagogue to pray, I noticed a flyer on the bulletin board. It featured a photo of WDC and the headline read: "This Summer Visit Our Nation's Capital with the Rabbi." Now if the rabbi of the Orthodox synagogue is teaching his congregation that their nation is America, and that their capital city is Washington, and not Jerusalem, how can you expect them to have a proper understanding of Judaism?

I remember when I was a boy, my grandfather would take me on trips to Lake George in upstate New York. On the way, there were all kinds of attractions for tourists like "Frontier Town" and "Indian Village." Now, the Birthright Program is a wonderful thing in that it affords young Jews to visit Israel for free, but instead of teaching them that Israel is their one and only homeland, and the place where they should be living, they use the Land of Israel as a giant "Israeli Village" to strengthen feelings of Jewish pride and identity. This approach distorts the real value of *Eretz Yisrael* and totally misses the foundation upon which all the Torah rests – that *Eretz Yisrael* is the Land of the Jews, the place that the Master of the Universe set aside for His People. In actuality, the truth is the other way around from the Birthright doctrine. In truth, Israel is our home, and America is a place you can visit for a ten day vacation - if you can find a valid *halachic* reason for leaving the Land.

For those of you who find my style jarring, here's pretty much the same message from Rabbi Kook in more scholarly garb:

“The thought regarding *Eretz Yisrael* that it has merely a peripheral value to facilitate the subsistence of the unified nation; even when it comes to fortify the concept of Judaism in the Diaspora, in order to preserve its form, and to strengthen the belief and fear of G-d, and to strengthen the performance of the commandments in a proper fashion - this orientation toward *Eretz Yisrael* is not worthy of lasting fruition, for its foundation is rickety in light of the towering, unshakable holiness of *Eretz Yisrael*” (Orot, 1:1).

Eretz Yisrael is more than a Jewish Disneyland to bolster Jewish identity for ten days before flying back to Toronto.

Someone who thinks that Jewish life in Toronto, or Brooklyn, or Monsey, is all roses and dandy, doesn't understand that Judaism doesn't just concern itself with the life of the individual Jew, but rather Judaism concerns itself with the welfare of the “*Clal*,” the Jewish Nation as a whole. Therefore, the plague of assimilation can only be stopped when all Jews live in Israel, amongst Jews, and not when living amongst the gentiles in foreign lands. That's one of the reasons why we have our own Land.

And for those devout Diasporians who maintain that their hermetic religious communities are safe from assimilation and danger, you are deluding yourselves into thinking that your future is secure. As our history has taught us the hard way, and as the Talmud attests, when a brushfire breaks out amongst the weeds, it isn't long before the winds carry it along to sweep up the haystacks as well. The haystacks are the Torah scholars and the flourishing Jewish communities. In Europe,

when the fires of anti-Semitism erupted, they didn't ravage only the weaker non-religious communities, they burnt up the stronger, more righteous bastions as well.

Diaspora Tells Moses to Get Lost

Imagine if Moses were to come to America today with the mission of bringing the Jews to Israel. Chances are that his call would be met by deaf ears. Let's face it - outside of a few weirdoes, who would listen? It would be interfering with their plans, their schooling, their careers, their businesses, their golf games and tennis lessons. Some would question his authority. Others would doubt that G-d had really sent him. Liberal and Reconstructionist Jews would answer, like Pharoah, *"Who's Hashem that I should listen to him?"* Others would laugh at Moses's Biblical garments and staff. Probably most of them would tell him to get lost.

"Aliyah is suicide," some would tell him, like the Spies and followers of Korach of old.

Not that it would ruffle Moses. After all, he had witnessed the very same scenario before, when he came to take the Jews out of Egypt. Back then, only a fifth of the Jews agreed to follow him to the Land of Israel. Four-fifths of the Egypt-loving Jews died in the plague of darkness.

The Torah describes it as darkness that could be felt (Shemot, 10:21). The darkness was so thick, you could literally reach out your hand and feel it. Rashi says that *Hashem* brought the plague of darkness upon Egypt "because there were Jews in that generation who were wicked and they did not want to come out of Egypt, and they died in the three days of darkness, in order that the Egyptians should not see their fall and say, *'They too are smitten as we are'*" (Shemot, 10: 22). To avoid the great embarrassment that His people, the Children of Israel, did

not want to go home to the Land of Israel, G-d brought a thick, tangible darkness over Egypt so that the heathens wouldn't see their demise.

Unfortunately this same dense darkness has enveloped the Diaspora today. The darkness is so thick, you can actual feel it. Jews who have made *aliyah*, and who go back to America, or France, or England, to visit relatives, will all report the same thing. After speaking with Diasporians for a few minutes, you get the creepy feeling that they are totally out of touch with reality. They think they know what's going on, but they don't know what's going on at all. I am not speaking about the idealistic people who search for news about Israel the first thing when they click on the Internet, to see what's happening "*b'Aretz*." They're already half-Israeli. Rather, I am referring to the average Diasporite. With him, you can talk about *aliyah* until you are blue in the face. Their darkness is so dense, they can't grasp what you are saying. What is really important to the Jewish People (what's happening in Israel), they don't think is important at all. And what's not important at all, like the new President, or the new Clint Eastwood movie, or their new car, they talk about like it was the only thing that mattered.

Whenever I have to go there, I get the feeling that I am in a gigantic dementia ward, where the patients have forgotten who they are. Washington D.C. is their capital. America is their homeland. Judaism is their religion, not their nationality. They are Americans first. The proof is that hearing the "Star Spangled Banner" at baseball games gives them goose bumps. Their children pledge allegiance to the American flag. Their forefathers are Betsy Ross and George Washington. If Moses himself came and tried to persuade them that the Land of Israel was their home, chances are they'd look at him like he was nuts.

That's the meaning of darkness that you can feel.

I am not blaming them. The darkness of materialism is so great, who can fight against it? And there is nobody there to teach them about true Judaism and the centrality of *Eretz Yisrael*. Instead of working to bring an end to the exile, they endeavor to lengthen it by strengthening their communities there. The only thing that can light up this darkness is their connection to *Eretz Yisrael*. As Rabbi Kook writes:

“The concept of Judaism in the Diaspora will only find true strength through the depth of its involvement in *Eretz Yisrael*. Only through its longing for *Eretz Yisrael* will Diaspora Judaism consistently receive its inherent qualities. The yearning for Salvation gives the Judaism of the Diaspora its power of stamina; whereas the Judaism of *Eretz Yisrael* is the Salvation itself” (Orot, 1:1).

Bagels and Beverly Hills

A Jew who comes on *aliyah* to Israel today has all kinds of organizations to assist him. There is Nefesh B'Nefesh, the Jewish Agency, Tehilla, and groups such as Americans and Canadians in Israel, the British Olim Society, and the like. Plus the Government of Israel offers tax breaks, subsidies, and other incentives. But the main help, of course, comes from G-d, as He promises in this week's Torah portion:

*"For the L-rd thy G-d brings thee into a good Land, a Land of water courses, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a Land of wheat, and barley, and vineyards, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a Land of olive oil, and honey; a Land where thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, **thou shall not lack anything in it**"* (Devarim, 8:7-9).

No organization can give you a better guarantee than that!

The verse which follows immediately after this Divine insurance policy is one of the 613 commandments of the Torah:

"When thou hast eaten and are satisfied, then thou shall bless the L-rd thy G-d for the good Land that He has given thee" (Devarim, 8:10).

This is what is called the *"Birkat HaMazone,"* the Blessing after Meals. After finishing a meal in which we ate bread, we are to thank G-d for the food and for the Land which He has given us, as we say, "Blessed are Thou, O L-rd, for the Land and the sustenance."

Thus, if we live in Paris, we say, "Blessed are Thou for the land of France and the sustenance."

If we live in Beverly Hills, we say, “Blessed are Thou for the land of America and the sustenance.”

Or if we are in Toronto we say, “Blessed are Thou for the land of Canada and the sustenance.”

Wait a minute! That isn’t right! Wherever we are on the globe, we say, “Blessed are thou, O L-rd, for the Land and the sustenance,” where the meaning of “the Land” is the Land of Israel.

Even if a Jewish astronaut were to eat a pastrami sandwich on the moon, he would still thank G-d for the pastrami sandwich and the Land of Israel.

How can it be that a Jew on the moon, or in a chic bagel café in Beverly Hills, or in some exclusive kosher French restaurant in Paris, should thank G-d for the Land of Israel? What’s the connection between the Land of Israel and a bagel or a baguette? We can readily understand why a Jew living in Israel would be required to thank G-d for the Land of Israel, since he is living there. But why should a Jew in France, or Canada, or Hong Kong, thank G-d for the Land of Israel after he eats? That, my good friends, is the question.

There are several facets to the answer. First, we thank G-d for the Land of Israel because a Jew is supposed to be living in the Land of Israel, and not in France or Canada. The sad fact that there are Jews living outside of the Land is in punishment for the sins of our past. When we were cast into exile a long time ago, our Rabbis decreed that we should continue to practice the *mitzvot*, even though G-d gave them to us to observe in *Eretz Yisrael*. This was in order to make sure that we wouldn’t forget how to do them during our long absence from our

Land, as Rashi's commentary teaches us in this week's Torah portion: "Even though I am exiling you from *Eretz Yisrael* to outside of the Land, distinguish yourselves with the commandments, so that when you return, they will not seem new in your eyes (Rashi, Devarim, 11:18; Sifre, Ekev, 11:18. See also Ramban on the Torah, there). Rashi explains with a parable: "This is like a king who became angry at his wife and sent her back to her father's house. He said to her, 'Wear your jewelry so it won't seem new to you when you return to the palace.' Thus the Holy One Blessed Be He says to Israel, 'My sons, distinguish yourselves with the precepts so that when you return, they won't be new to you.' This is what the prophet, Jeremiah, meant when he said, '*Set up way marks for yourself, make yourself signposts*'" (Jeremiah, 31:20). These are the *mitzvot* which the People of Israel are commanded to do" (Rashi, loc cited).

Included in this is the *mitzvah* of grace after meals. Even though we have been temporarily uprooted from our home in Israel, we are to continue to thank G-d for the food and for the Land of Israel, the one and only place that we are really supposed to live.

A further reason why we thank G-d for *Eretz Yisrael* and not England or America is because the commandment states, "*When thou hast eaten and are satisfied, then thou shall bless the L-rd thy G-d for the good Land that he has given thee*" (Devarim, 8:10). G-d didn't give the Jews the land of America. G-d gave it to the Indians until the Americans came and slaughtered them all.

The other reason why we continue to thank G-d for the Land of Israel is to ingrain in our psyche the centrality of the Land of Israel to the Torah

and to Jewish life. Every time that we eat a meal, we are to repeat this understanding until it becomes like a mantra, implanting in our brains the eternal recognition that our one and only homeland, the place where we are to live out our lives, and the source of our physical and spiritual sustenance, is *Eretz Yisrael* - and not France, Canada, or the USA.

Today, when the decree of exile has lifted, and every Jew can simply hop on an airplane and come back home to Israel within a few hours, our days of schizophrenia are over. Finally, a Jew can eat his meal and fulfill the *mitzvah* in its intended wholeness, so that when he says the grace after meals, he can say it where it was meant to be said, whether it be a bagel café on Dizengoff Street or in a baguette shop on Rehov Yafo: “Blessed art Thou, O L-rd, for the Land and for the sustenance.” Amen.

Seder Night

In Mom's nursing home, there's an automatic bicycle machine. All you have to do is strap the old timer's feet onto the pedals and turn on the motor. The machine does all the work. It gets the blood circulating, which is vital for people who live sedentary lives. But, of course, it's not like riding a real bicycle, because the cyclist is just going through the motions.

For a lot of people, that's what Passover *Seder* Night is like. They go through the motions of reading the *Haggadah*, eating *matzah*, and drinking four cups of wine, but they don't internalize the message of the *Seder* and act on its teachings. Like with the automatic bicycle, there's a lot of action, but they really aren't going anywhere.

With *Pesach* approaching, just what is the message of the holiday and the Passover *Seder*?

Pesach is called the holiday of freedom. It commemorates our freedom from exile in a foreign land. That initial *galut* (exile) happened to be in Mitzrayim (Egypt), but it could have been in Brooklyn, Toronto, Manchester, or Melbourne as well. For a Jew, exile means living outside of the Land of Israel. Some exiles seem worse than others, but as long as a Jew is living in the Diaspora, he or she is in exile. He's living in someone else's land. He's a stranger. A minority. Nothing is his. Everything belongs to the gentiles who rule there. Sure, there are Jews who will protest and say, "I'm an American just like everyone else," or "I'm a Canadian just like everyone else," but this is just a delusion. A Jew is a Jew. He is a member of the Children of Israel. He may have a birth certificate from the United States and a US passport, but those are

external to his true essence, like the travel decals you stick on a suitcase. For instance, because he is a Jew, he has an eternal, inner attachment to the Torah and its commandments. Just as he can't say, "I don't believe in the Torah, therefore I don't have any obligation to keep kosher," he also can't say, "Because I was born in America, I don't have any connection to *Eretz Yisrael*." No way. Because he is a Jew, he is part of the Covenant and the gift of *Eretz Yisrael* to the Jewish People. He is a part of the Divine commandment to live there. *Eretz Yisrael* is the Land of the Jews, not Canada or England. As long as he is outside of the Land of Israel, he is in exile. And if he thinks that he is not exile, because he feels free there and the gentiles accept him, it is exile all the same. Ironically, the worse an exile is, the better it is for the Jew, because at least he realizes that he is in exile. For instance, the Jews in Russia knew they were in exile. But when the exile is comfortable, like in Brooklyn and Toronto, a Jew can easily fool himself into thinking that he isn't in exile at all, and that's the worse bondage there is.

So, first and foremost, the holiday of *Pesach* comes to teach us that G-d chose us as his special Nation and freed us from bondage to take us out of exile and establish us in *Eretz Yisrael*, as the *Haggadah* begins:

"This is the bread of affliction that our forefathers ate in the land of Mitzrayim. All who need may come and eat, all who need may come and share in our *Pesach* meal. This year we are here, next year may we be in the Land of Israel. This year we are slaves, next year may we be free men."

This means that the goal of our lives should be to leave the exile and live in the Land of Israel. Our Sages are teaching us that no matter

where we recite the *Haggadah*, whether it be in Warsaw, Moscow, Berlin, New York, or sunny Miami Beach, we are in exile. We are in bondage in a foreign land, surrounded by a foreign culture. Only when we live in *Eretz Yisrael* are we free men.

This teaching is repeated at end of the *Seder* when we joyously declare, “Next year in Jerusalem!”

Therefore, my cherished brothers, this year, make your *Seder* night meaningful. Make it real. Don’t just go through the motions. Strive to internalize its teachings. In the great Divine illumination that comes on *Pesach* night, understand with all of your being that you are living in bondage in exile amongst the gentiles, in a foreign land, and all you have to do to get free is pack up a few clothes and hop on a plane to Israel. Everything else is here for you waiting.

It’s as simple as that!

The Four Sons

Let's apply the famous Four Sons of the *Pesach Seder* to the *mitzvah* of living in the Land of Israel. Here's what is written in the *Haggadah*:

"The Torah speaks of four children: One is wise, one is wicked, one is simple, and one does not know how to ask.

"The wise child, what does he say? 'What are the symbols, rules, and laws that the L-rd our G-d commanded you?' Then you shall tell him the laws of *Pesach* up to: 'We do not taste anything after the *Afikoman*.'"

When the wise Jew looks at modern history and sees that G-d has brought about World Wars and international treaties to bring His scattered children back to the Land of Israel after an exile of nearly 2000 years, and sees the incredible rebirth of the previously barren Land, and the miracle of rebuilding, technological development, military might, and sees how Israel has become once again the center of Torah learning for the Jewish People, he seeks to understand how he can place his life in line with G-d's will for the Nation. Faced with the clear realizations of ancient prophecies promising the ingathering of the outcasts and the resettlement of the Land, and the tangible rebuilding that everyone who visits the country can see, he understands that it is G-d's unfolding game plan that Jews abandon the Diaspora and come home on *aliyah*. So, he seeks to learn how he can best perform the *mitzvah*. He does this by asking the Sages in Israel who can explain these matters to him, by reading the writings of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook, by studying books like "The Kuzari," "Eim HaBanim Semeichah," the writings of Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook, and by listening to Torah lectures on websites like Yeshiva.org and Machon Meir

(www.machonmeir.net/english/). Part of his wisdom is his humility. In realizing that he does not have all the answers, he seeks explanations from people who do. He longs to be a part of the great national Jewish undertaking that he sees unfolding before his eyes in Israel, and he longs to join those idealistic souls who are working with G-d to bring about the promised Redemption by coming to live in the Land.

The *Haggadah* continues:

“The wicked child, what does he say? ‘What is this service to YOU?’ To YOU, but not to me! Because he removes himself from the community, he denies everything. Thus, you should also give him a blunt answer [literally: smash him in the teeth] and say, ‘Because of this, G-d did things for me – but not for YOU! If you had been there, you would not have been saved.’”

These wicked children are the scorners, the talkbackers who always find things wrong with Israel. This wicked child removes himself from the wondrous ingathering that G-d is bringing about because it is not to his liking. It doesn’t match his way of doing things. He doesn’t agree with G-d. He would do things better. In the meantime, he’s staying put in Cyberspace, New York.

Regarding this child, the “*Me’am Lo’ez*” commentary on the *Haggadah* writes: “By excluding himself from the observance, this child is considered to have denied the essence of Judaism. You must therefore give him a blunt answer so as to set his teeth on edge. He is not allowed to taste the Pascal lamb. Let him watch you eat the fragrant, tasty lamb, and sit there grinding his teeth. G-d did this for me – for me and

not for YOU. If you had been in Egypt, you would not have been delivered.”

The *Haggadah* continues:

“The simple child, what does he say? ‘What is this?’ You shall say to him, *‘With a strong hand, G-d took us out of Egypt, from the house of slaves.’*”

The simple child has good intentions. He sees that G-d is indeed bringing the Jewish People back to the Land of Israel from the four corners of the globe. He is interested to know more about it. He hasn’t learned these things in the past, and he isn’t accustomed to Torah learning, so you answer him by telling him the full historical story, from our beginnings as a People, how G-d gave us the Land of Israel, and how we lost it due to our sins, how we suffered in the exile at the hands of the gentiles, and how G-d is bringing us back now, through the developments of modern history and the establishment of the State of Israel.

The *Haggadah* goes on:

“And as for the one who does not know how to ask, you must begin for him, as it is written, *‘You shall tell your child on that day, Because of this, G-d did things for me when I left Egypt.’*”

This child is so out of things that he knows absolutely nothing. He never learned. No one ever taught him. To him, Israel is no different from New Zealand or Thailand. To stimulate his imagination, you have to tell him about the miracles of the Exodus, how G-d overturned all of the laws of nature to bring the Jewish people out of Egypt to the Land of

Israel. Once he is interested, you can encourage this child to learn more about his Jewish identity and his G-d--given destiny.

And then, as the holy *Rebbe* of *Chabad* explained, there is the fifth child, who doesn't show up at the *Seder* at all. He's either stoned out of his mind in some disco in Bangkok, or busy hiding Easter eggs for his gentile children to discover after the Easter parade.

May *Hashem* have mercy on us and redeem us from all of our screwed up notions, both here in Israel and abroad.

The Great Call

Rabbi Kook writes that the true *t'shuva* of the Jewish people is in our return to *Eretz Yisrael*. Again and again, in his letters and speeches, he called the Jewish people to return home to Zion. One public proclamation, sent out all over the Diaspora, years before the Holocaust, was entitled, "The Great Call."

THE GREAT CALL

"To the Land of Israel, Gentlemen, To the Land of Israel! Let us utter this appeal in one voice, in a great and never-ending cry.

"Come to the Land of Israel, dear brothers, come to the Land of Israel. Save your souls, the soul of your generation, the soul of the entire nation; save her from desolation and destruction, save her from decay and degradation, save her from defilement and all evil — from all of the suffering and oppression that threatens to come upon her in all the lands of the world without exception or distinction....

"Escape with your lives and come to Israel; G-d's voice beckons us; His hand is outstretched to us; His spirit within our hearts unites us, encourages us and obliges us all to cry in a great, powerful and awesome voice: Brothers! Children of Israel, beloved and dear brethren, come to the Land of Israel, do not tarry with arrangements and official matters; rescue yourselves, gather, come to the Land of Israel...

"From the time we were exiled from our Land, the Torah has accompanied Israel into exile, wandering from Babylon to France, Spain, Germany, Eastern and Central Europe, Poland, Russia, and

elsewhere. And now, how happy we would be if we were able to say that she has returned to her first place, to the Land of Israel, together with the people of Israel, which continues to multiply in the Holy Land.

“And now, who is so blind that he does not see the L-rd’s hand guiding us in this, and does not feel obligated to work along with G-d? A heavenly voice in the future will cry aloud on top of the mountains and say, *‘Whoever has wrought with G-d, let him come and receive his reward.’* Who can exempt himself from doing his part in bringing additional blessing and swifter salvation; from awakening many hearts to return to the Holy Land, to the L-rd’s legacy, that they may become a part of it, to settle it with enterprises and buildings, to purchase property, to plant and sow, to do everything necessary for the foundation of life of a stable and organized settlement....”

BANNER OF JERUSALEM

Another public proclamation was addressed to Orthodox communities to urge their *Aliyah* to Israel. In establishing a movement called “The Banner of Jerusalem,” Rabbi Kook called upon all religious Jews to come to Israel to rebuild the nation’s spiritual life, just as the secular Zionists were rebuilding the physical:

“Jews! We call you to the sacred task of building our Jewish nation in our Holy Land, in *Eretz Yisrael*. Come to us, rally together under the “Banner of Jerusalem” which we now raise aloft before the whole Jewish religious public.

“We all know the ‘Banner of Zion’ which unites a certain portion of our brethren on the basis of our Jewish secular interests in the Land of Israel. But there are many who have not joined the union of those who

bear the Zionist flag, and a great many who feel it impossible to do so. We simply record the plain fact that this is so, without questioning its veracity.

“Yet it cannot be that the largest, most natural, and earnest portion of Jewry, the majority of the Jewish religious public, should remain indifferent to the wonderful events of the present, and not lend a hand in the holy task of building our nation on our sacred soil because of so-called objections....

“Jews, all the loyal believers in the Jewish faith, there can be no doubt that the Divine power is now manifesting itself in us amidst the great world events. We are certainly called to return to our ancient home in the Land of Israel, there to renew our ancient holy life....

“We religious Jews must all profoundly know and believe that the Divine hand is now leading us openly to our high, ideal destiny. We must make known to the whole world, the true meaning of the present wondrous happenings, whose purpose is so clearly the hastening of our redemption and salvation, from which alone will also spring forth the redemption and salvation of all mankind.

“With the flaming, illuminating, Divine faith, with all the luster of our holy Torah, with the vitality of all of the most refined and devout Jews, we shall carry our flag, the ‘Banner of Jerusalem’ by which alone the ‘Banner of Zion’ will also be properly hoisted. For the value of Jewish secular power will be elucidated to the world only in the light of our holy Jewish spiritual power, emphasized by the uplifted voices of the whole religious Jewish world community, setting with holy enthusiasm to the task of our national construction, of our return to the Land of

Israel, by the grace of the Divine and illuminating light, O House of Jacob, come, and let us walk in the light of the L-rd.”

Amen.

We Are Not Jews!

I don't pretend that a single blog can rectify a distortion of thousands of years. But the fact is that we are not Jews. We are Israelis. The term "Jew" is not mentioned in the Torah. The Torah describes us as the "Children of Israel," but never as Jews. The term Jew is an anti-Semitic label that evolved during the Babylonian exile. For instance, the hero of the *Purim* saga, Mordechai, is known as "Mordechai the Jew." After the destruction of the First Temple, Mordechai was exiled from Jerusalem with the captives who were carried away with King Yekhoniah of Judah. Because this mass of exiled Israelis came from the tribe of Judah, they were called Jews, which comes from the Hebrew term "*Yehudi*," a person from the tribe of *Yehudah* (Judah). The "*Me'am Lo'ez*" commentary on *Megillat Ester* explains that because Mordechai was led away with the tribe of Judah, he was called a Jew – literally a Judahite, even though he himself was from the tribe of Benjamin. But in fact, he and all of the other exiles were Israelis, or Israelites. In the exile, they became known as Jews, instead of being referred to as the exiled Children of Israel.

I write this in reaction to a news item I saw concerning the former Israel Consul General in New York, Arye Mekel, who recently returned home to Israel. He stated in an interview that all his life he felt that he was a Jew first and an Israeli second. In relation to the Israel-Diaspora connection, he said, "Only in understanding that we are one and the same, Jews first and Israelis second, can we continue to make this partnership flourish."

Unfortunately, he has it upside down, and this is a very big reason why *aliyah* is so low. We are not Jews first and Israelis second. We are Israelis first, second, and third. Some of us are Israelis who have been blessed to live in Israel, and others are Israelis who live under the curse of the exile in foreign lands, but they are Israelis, too. Call them Israelis in captivity, or Israelis in exile, or Outcasts of Israel. Why call them Jews? This is misleading. It is a formula for the schizophrenic thinking that so characterizes Diasporians, who think that they are American Jews, or French Jews, or Australian Jews, when in fact they are the Children of Israel exiled to other lands. Their nationality isn't American or French. Their nationality is Israeli. They are Israelis who live in the captivity of America, or Israelis who live in the exile of France. If you educate a child to understand that he is an Israeli living in the exile of a foreign land, then when he grows up there is an excellent chance that he will opt to come home to Israel. But if you tell him that he is an American Jew, then you are dooming him to a life in the exile of America.

Under Israel's Law of Return, every "Jew" in the world has the right to return home to Israel, with the privileges the law embodies, precisely because he is an Israeli. Because of an aberration of history, he, or she, has been living in a foreign land, but they are Israelis all the same. And being Israelis, they all have the obligation to pay taxes to Israel, and to serve in the Israeli Army, or to do national service in Israel. They also should have the right to vote in Israeli elections. Only with this understanding will we be able to erase the mind warp that has been perpetrated upon us for thousands of years and return to our true, healthy identity as the People of Israel. "*Am Yisrael Chai!*"

“By the Rivers of Brooklyn”

A practice among especially pious Jews is to rise at midnight and recite the midnight lamentation called *“Tikun Hatzot”* over the destruction of Jerusalem and our exile from our Land. The prayers are said in a mournful tone, sitting on the floor. Many have the practice of donning a burlap sack on the flesh to help feel the pain of the *Shechinah* which went into exile along with the Jews in terrible anguish and shame. The lamentation begins with the Psalm, *“By the Rivers of Babylon.”* The Psalm goes like this:

“By the rivers of Brooklyn, and Toronto, and Los Angeles, and Paris, and Melbourne, we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.

“Upon the willows there we hung up our harps, when our captors demanded of us songs, our tormentors asked of us mirth, saying, ‘Sing us some songs of Zion.’

“How shall we sing the L-rd’s song in a foreign land?

“If I ever forget you, O Jerusalem, withered be my right hand!

“May my tongue cleave to my palate, if ever I not think of you, if I ever not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!”

Kind David wants to remind us that we are to set Jerusalem above our highest joy. In addition, in order that the centrality of *Eretz Yisrael* and Jerusalem fills a Jew’s heart and thoughts, our Sages enacted that we recite this Psalm during the week after meals. To teach us that wherever we may stuff our faces with the finest of gourmet kosher

foods, we will always remember that we belong in the Land of Israel, and not in foreign countries. To teach us that without living in the Land of Israel, our lives are shattered and our happiness can never be complete.

Centrality of Eretz Yisrael

Since many of our readers don't have a yeshiva background, I don't often write blogs discussing *halacha*. However, because there are still devotees of the exile who don't understand the centrality of *Eretz Yisrael* to Judaism, and who believe that the *mitzvah* of living in Israel is some unsubstantiated Zionist folklore, I will try to summarize a basic *halachic* concept that the Torah giant, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook, of blessed memory, would teach his students at the *Mercaz HaRav* Yeshiva in Jerusalem.

The Rambam himself emphasizes the centrality of *Eretz Yisrael* to Judaism in his treatise, "Sefer HaMitzvot," concerning the positive commandment to sanctify the new month (Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Precept 153). In a lengthy discussion, he makes it clear that it is the Jews of the Land of Israel who constitute the Jewish Nation. Even if the majority of Jews were exiled from the Land, it is not the Torah centers outside of Israel which make up the heart of the Nation, but the Jewish farmers and peasants who live in *Eretz Yisrael*. This is illustrated by the calculation of the Jewish calendar, which can only be established by the Jews in Israel, irrelevant of their status in Torah.

The calculation of the new moon, and hence of all the months, years, and dates on which the holidays fall, can only be done in the Land of Israel (Ibid. Also, Berachot 63A and B; Sanhedrin 11B; Devarim, 12:5). This was performed by witnesses, who upon observance of the new moon, would travel to Jerusalem to testify before the *Beit Din*, the High Jewish Court (Mishna, Rosh HaShana, 1:3-3:1). When the Sages saw the

foreign persecution and rule over Israel threatened to disrupt the line of rabbinic ordination (*smeichah*), handed down from Moshe to the Torah leaders of each generation, thus placing the authority of the Rabbinic judges in doubt, they sanctified for all time the calendar which we use today (Rambam, Laws of Sanctify the Month, 5:3).

The Rambam makes clear that this can only be done in Israel:

“Know! This accounting of months which we calculate today, which tells us of the beginning of the months and the holidays, is not allowed to be made, except in the Land of Israel, exclusively... and **here lies a very great foundation from the axioms of our belief, which was not known or understood except among the deep learners of Torah....** We only make this accounting today to know the day that the Jews living in Israel established, for from their accounting we calculate the months today, and not by our observation of the new moon. We base our calculation on their fixing the calendar and not upon ours. And our accounting is nothing more than the substantiation of their words” (Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Precept 153).

The Rambam adds:

“If we could suppose, for example, that the Children of Israel disappeared from *Eretz Yisrael*, G-d forbid the Almighty ever do this, since He had already promised not to totally erase or uproot all signs of the NATION – then our reckoning of the months would not help us at all, in any way whatsoever, because we are not empowered to make the reckonings outside of the Land of Israel, as we explained, ‘*From Zion shall go forth Torah*’” (Ibid).

The revered Torah authority, the Chatam Sofer, explains the deep import of what the Rambam is saying:

“If, G-d forbid, a single Jew wasn’t living in Israel, even if there were Jews living outside the Land, **this would be the destruction of the entire NATION**, G-d forbid.... The Rambam asserted that the times of the years, and the months, and the holy days which the early Torah authorities calculated were valid only if there were at least vine growers and farmers in Israel who would determine when the time had arrived. And if this wasn’t so, then the reckoning and sanctification of the early Sages would have no effect, and **the entire Torah would be null and void, G-d forbid, and there wouldn’t be any NATION of Israel, G-d forbid, and our existence as a NATION would be utterly destroyed, G-d forbid**. But our Creator promised us that this would never be” (Responsa, Chatam Sofer, Yoreh Deah, 234).

Not only did the Rambam believe that living in Israel was a *mitzvah*, he felt it was a *mitzvah* on which the whole Torah was based!

So the next time you think you’re right in the center of things in Brooklyn or Monsey, New York, put that in your salmon and smoke it!

Please Don't Bury Me in Boca!

That's what our holy forefather, Yaacov, would have told his kids if he had lived in our times. Don't bury me here in America! Take me to our homeland in Israel and bury me in the Cave of the Patriarchs, where my father and grandfather are buried. That's what Yaacov ordered his children when his death approached in Egypt. Even though he could have been buried like a king in a fantastic pyramid in Goshen, he made his sons swear to take him out of Egypt and bury him in Israel.

Our Sages give several explanations for this:

*If a Jew dies in the Diaspora, in order to be resurrected in the future, he or she will have to roll to Israel through painful underground tunnels, something that Yaacov wished to avoid.

*Yaacov knew that *Hashem* would strike the land of Egypt with terrible plagues and he didn't want his body to get smashed in the barrage of insects and hail.

*He didn't want his burial crypt in Egypt to be turned into a shrine of idol worship.

But his main reason was:

***He wanted his children to know that their real home was the Land of Israel and not Egypt. He was afraid that if he was buried in Egypt, his children and grandchildren would always stay in Egypt, whether with the true desire to be close to his grave, or with the excuse that "How can we leave Egypt and leave our dead father behind?" He wanted to

express his contempt for the Diaspora, with the statement that he didn't even want to be buried there, let alone live there! He knew that his children had already settled comfortably down in the foreign land, sinking into the deviant mores of Egyptian culture, and that assimilation was just around the corner. Thus he made it known for all time, for all of his descendants, that *Eretz Yisrael* is the homeland of the Jews and not the Diaspora.

The lessons in the Torah about the lives of our holy forefathers are lessons for us. Abraham was commanded to leave his birthplace and go live in the Land of Israel; Yitzhak was told not to leave the Land of Israel at all; and Yaacov commanded his sons to take him out of Egypt after his death and bury him in the Land of Israel. The Torah teaches us these things in order that Jews for all generations to come would remember that G-d wants His Holy People to live in the Holy Land.

But why only be buried in Israel when you can live here?

Hope to see you here soon!

Dual-Loyalty Quiz

There seems to be a lot of confusion regarding whether a Diaspora Jew owes his national allegiance to the gentile country where he lives, or to Israel, the home of the Jews. This is because over the long course of exile away from our homeland, Judaism was denuded to being a religion like any other, lacking its all-encompassing national component that only the Land of Israel provides. To help people determine where they stand on this crucial question, we have devised a Jewish identity test. While we have chosen the example of America as our Diaspora nationality, Jews living in other countries can substitute similar questions from the lands of their exile, whether it be England, France, Australia, or the North Pole.

Which flag do you identify with as yours - the Star of David or the Stars and Stripes?

Which is your nation's capital – Jerusalem or Washington D.C.?

Which historic landmark moves you more – the *Kotel* or Plymouth Rock?

Which picture evokes a prouder more patriotic response – the Israeli Paratroopers gazing up at the Kotel or the United States Marines raising the flag in Iwo Jima?

With which of these two mountains do you identify with more – the Temple Mount or Mount Rushmore?

If Israel and America were at war, which country would you support?

Which of these men made a greater impact on modern history – Theodore Herzl or John Fitzgerald Kennedy?

Who do you consider the forefather of your nation – Abraham or George Washington?

Which of these foods do you prefer – a falafel or a hot dog?

Where would you prefer to be buried – on the Mount of Olives or in the Arlington National Cemetery?

Test results:

Jews who have identified with America in five or more questions are invited to come to Israel for a visit to learn about their true national identity. Some serious Torah study is also certain to improve your score the next time you take the quiz.

Fasten Your Seat Belt!

I had to rent a car for a day, and every time I forgot to fasten my seatbelt, a little bell rang over and over again to remind me. And the dashboard was illuminated with all kinds of symbols designed to inform me if something was amiss in the car's performance.

How wonderful it would be, I thought, if a little warning bell rang every time a person spoke badly about someone else, or clicked on an erotic site on the Internet, or took a bite of non-kosher food. Of course, the dashboard of a Jew is far more complicated than the dashboard of an auto. In fact, the control panel of a Jew more resembles the cockpit of a jet.

For a Jew to function at proper standards and levels, every detail of his or her behavior has to be in line with the guidelines of the Torah. What he eats; what he looks at; what he wears; what he hears; what he thinks; what he does; where he goes; when, how, and with whom he conducts his sexual relations. Everything.

Since we don't have a dashboard to guide us, the dials and levels of our control panel are precisely recorded in the *halacha* – the codes of Jewish Law.

If we are not living in the guidelines of *halacha*, our performance as Jews is bound to be off, and sooner or later, the system will crash.

In addition, our Sages established the proper aspirations and feelings that every Jew should have. They wrote them down in the order of our daily prayers. The Sages established the order of prayer, three times a day, to serve as constant reminders, like seatbelt warning rings, to keep

us pointed in the right direction. For instance, if a Jew isn't yearning for redemption from the *galut*, for the ingathering of the exiles, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, he should hear a DING, DONG, DING ringing inside his brain as he says the *Amidah* prayer.

Please note that before reciting the morning's "*Shema Yisrael*" prayer, we beseech G-d, "And shatter the yoke of the gentiles from over our necks, and speedily lead us with upright postures to our Land."

The Sages are reminding us that if we don't feel the yoke of the gentiles over our necks in our exile existence, then something is out of whack with our Jewish orientation. If the exile seems pleasant in our eyes, and we imagine that we live there in freedom, then something is amiss with our proper Jewish sensitivities. In the exile, the Sages tell us, we are like broken people, bowed down to our foreign master, always trying to be "an acceptable Jew," in order to get along with the ruling landlords. But our prayers teach us that we should feel otherwise. In our hearts, we should be longing for true Jewish pride, which can only be achieved when we walk back upright to our own Jewish Land.

This understanding is emphasized in this week's Torah portion, as it says regarding exile: "*And the L-rd shall scatter you among the nations, and you shall be left few in number amongst the nations... and there you shall serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone*" (Devarim, 4:27).

"Hey, we aren't serving other gods!" I can hear you protesting. But Rashi explains that by serving the gentiles who serve other gods, it is like idol worship itself (See Rashi there). Our Sages inform us that the "wood and stone" of the verse refers to the Christians who bow down

to wooden statues, and to the Muslims who bow to the big black rock in Mecca. In other words, living in the exile is living under the yoke of the gentiles, and a Jew should always feel an inner sense of subjugation, of not belonging, along with a compulsion to leave.

We are not supposed to recite our prayers by rote, out of touch with what we are saying. We are supposed to internalize the words, and their messages, and act according to their teachings.

DING DONG DING! DING DONG DING!

Force-Feeding

It frequently occurs that the old timers in Mom's nursing home don't want to eat. When that happens, they have to be force-fed. It doesn't look so pleasant to see it, and it's less pleasant to be the one handling the spoon, but what can you do? Though it looks like you're hurting the person, you're really doing a big *mitzvah*. Sometimes a stubborn person will clamp his or her teeth shut like iron, and you have to cajole, and raise your voice, and push the spoon into the mouth with more force than you would have liked, but the food has got to get down the throat in order to keep the person alive.

It's the same with writing about *aliyah*. A lot of people clamp shut their teeth and don't want to imbibe the message, but they have to be fed anyway, in order to save their lives. In the famous prophecy of the Dried Bones, the Prophet, Ezekiel, compared the exile to a graveyard. The *Gaon of Vilna* teaches that the foreign cultures in foreign lands are like worms that eat away at the bones of the Jewish People (including the Torah scholars) until our true understanding of the Torah becomes decayed and we forget that we really belong in the Land of Israel.

Since *Pesach* is a month away, it is the custom to already begin learning about the holiday. As we have written in the past, the goal of our exodus from Egypt was to bring the Jews to the Land of Israel, as G-d tells Moshe at their very first encounter: *"I have surely seen the affliction of My People who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows, and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of Egypt to bring them up out of*

that land to a good and large Land flowing with milk and honey....”
(Shemot, 3:7-8).

The goal of the exodus is to reestablish the Jewish People in the Land of Israel. Along the way, there is a stop at Mount Sinai to receive our holy code of life, the Torah, which will allow the Jews to live a life of prosperity, security, blessing and *shalom* in their unique Holy Land. But Sinai is only a way station. The destination is Israel. We are to live our lives as Jews as part of the Jewish Nation, the Nation of Israel, in the Land of Israel, and not in Egypt, America, Canada, or Europe.

The terrible sin of the Spies was in rejecting G-d’s plan for the Jewish People in *Eretz Yisrael*. They wanted to stay put in the wilderness. After all, they had the comfort of the *manna*, the miraculous well, and the protective Clouds of Glory – why journey on to Israel where they would have to fight savage enemies and work hard to make the holy soil give forth its fruit?

Sound familiar?

That’s why some people have to be force-fed. Even though they don’t want to imbibe the message, it’s for their own good. Sure they think I’m a monster trying to shove a spoon down their throat, but it’s really because I love them, the same way that I love my Mom.

The Fourth of July - Who Cares?

One of the great things about Israel is that when Christmas time comes around, you don't notice it at all. Sure, if you go to Bethlehem, you'll see Christmas decorations and maybe a manger, but what Jew goes to Bethlehem anymore? The same is true with the Fourth of July. True, I saw somebody driving around yesterday with American flags waving from his car windows, but I didn't think of the Fourth of the July. My wife, who is Israeli, asked, "Why would anyone want to drive with American flags flying out of his car?" At the time, I didn't know what to answer. Only when I noticed the hoopla on Yahoo did I realize that it was the Fourth of July. In Israel, it was the 17th of Tammuz, a fast day over the destruction of the walls of Jerusalem. Who cares about the Fourth of July?

The truth is that not many Americans really care about it either. It's a day off from work, maybe a barbecue, a chance to do some discount shopping, and see some fireworks on TV. OK, maybe there are still a few patriotic Americans who get misty when they hear the Star Spangled Banner and see Old Betsy wave in the wind. But for a Jew to celebrate the Fourth of July? It's as absurd as an American Indian going to a double-header in honor of the day.

OK. Sorry, sorry. I know there are Jews out there who don't like it when I come across as a fanatic. Therefore, to all you Jews in America, if you want to drink beer and eat hot dogs on the Fourth of July because America has been good to the Jews, then drink your Budweisers and eat your hot dogs. But after you finish your meal and thank G-d for the food and the land, don't confuse matters and think that the land in the

Birkat HaMazone blessing is referring to America. The Torah wants a Jew to praise G-d for having given him the Land of Israel, not for the old US of A. In formulating the blessing, our Sages wanted a Jew to remember Jerusalem, not Washington D.C. or New York. Go ahead and eat your hot dogs, if they are kosher. Drink your beer. But don't think that the Fourth of July is Independence Day. For a Jew, Independence Day is *Yom Haatzmaut*. Remember, my Diaspora friend, your ancestors were Israelis. Your nation is Israel, not American. You should be saluting the Star of David, not the Stars and Stripes. Remember that you are only in America, temporarily, because of the curse of *galut*. Perhaps you were born there, but it isn't your home. When a baseball sails into the bleachers for a game-winning grand slam, the *goy* cheering next to you may flash you a happy smile, but he really hates your guts.

So have a happy Fourth of July if you like. But don't pretend it is Independence Day for you. If you are a Jew, the "land of the free and the home of the brave" is in Israel.

Hope to see you here soon.

Out of the Mouth of Babes

We mentioned that many people are so cross-eyed in the dark maze of their exiles that they fail to see the light that is so obvious to anyone who looks with straightforward vision. The situation is similar to the laws of writing sacred texts. For instance, if a reader of a Torah scroll is not certain whether a letter is damaged or written incorrectly, whether it is an unusually extended *yud*, or a too short *vav*, and no one is sure, he must call a child up to the scroll and ask his opinion. Whatever the child answers is the verdict, determining whether the Torah scroll is kosher or not.

This same test can be applied to the question whether or not G-d wants the Jewish People to live in the Land of Israel. Make the test yourself. Take any fourth grade or fifth grade class of Jewish kids in your community. Have all of them read the Book of *Devarim* (Deuteronomy). Then ask them where G-d wants the Jewish People to live. The test is as simple as that. That way you'll get the answer straight from the mouth of babes. Or if you want to be 100% objective, choose a class of non-Jews in any public school. Ask them the same question. I bet every one of the kids answers, "In the Land of Israel."

Why do I say this? Because, as you study the Book of *Devarim* for the next two months, notice how many times it says, in one phrasing or another: "*These are the commandments that I have given you **to do in the Land** that I have given you to possess.*"

*"Now therefore, hearken O Israel, to the statutes and to the judgments which I teach you to do them, that you may live and **go in and possess the Land** which the L-rd G-d of your fathers gives you"* (Devarim, 4:1).

*“Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the L-rd my G-d commanded me, that you should act accordingly **in the Land** whither you go in to possess” (Devarim, 4:5).*

*“And the L-rd commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might do them **in the Land** into which you go over to possess” (Devarim, 4:14).*

*“Thou shall keep therefore His statutes and His commandments which I command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and that thou may prolong thy days **upon the Land** which the L-rd thy G-d gives thee, forever” (Devarim, 4:40).*

*“I will speak to thee all of the commandments and the statutes and the judgments, which thou shall teach them, that they may do them **in the Land** which I gave them to possess” (Devarim, 5:27).*

*“You shall walk in all the ways which the L-rd your G-d has commanded you, that you may live, and that it be well with you, and that you may prolong your days **in the Land** which you shall possess” (Devarim, 5:30).*

*“Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments, which the L-rd your G-d commanded to teach you, that you might do them **in the Land** into which you go to possess it” (Devarim, 6:1).*

*“Hear therefore, O Israel, and take care to do it, that it may be well with thee, and that you may increase mightily, as the L-rd G-d of thy fathers has promised thee, **in that Land** that flows with milk and honey” (Devarim, 6:3).*

*“All the commandments which I command thee this day shall you observe to do, that you may live and multiply, and **go in and possess the Land** which the L-rd swore to your fathers” (Devarim, 8:1).*

*“Therefore shall you keep all the commandments which I command you this day, that you may be strong, and go in and possess the Land, into which you go to possess it; that you may prolong your days **in the Land**, which the L-rd swore to your fathers to give to them, a Land flowing with milk and honey” (Devarim, 11:8)*

“in the Land....”

“in the Land....”

“in the Land....”

To cite just a few of the verses.

The commandments were given to us to be performed in the Land of Israel. And while we're on the subject, let's take a quick look at this week's Torah portion, the beginning of *Devarim*. Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda HaKohen Kook would repeat this to his students year after year by saying, “Look what we have here! Moshe begins to explain the Torah to the Children of Israel as they are about to enter the Promised Land. We are about to hear the commentary of Moshe *Rabainu* on the Torah. Pretty good teacher, right? Rashi writes that Moshe explained them the Torah in 70 languages. (Maybe so that the English Jews, and the French Jews, and the Spanish-speaking Jews would be sure to understand.)

And what is the first thing that Moshe tells them?

“The L-rd our G-d spoke to us in Horev, saying, You have dwelt long enough in this mountain: turn and take up your journey” (Devarim, 1:7).

In other words: Let’s go guys. You’ve hung around in this wilderness long enough! And where are they supposed to go? Moshe reminds them what G-d has already told them on the way out from Egypt:

*“Behold I have set the Land before you; go in and possess the Land which the L-rd swore to your fathers, Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaacov, to give them and **to their seed after them**” (Devarim, 1:8).*

The Land isn’t Greenland, or Iceland, or even Disneyland. It’s the LAND OF ISRAEL. And *“their seed”* – that’s us!

Once again, cherished brothers and sisters. What is Moshe telling them? Ask the fourth graders. He is telling them that they have lingered long enough around the mountain of Sinai – they are to take up their journey and go on to Israel. Sinai was merely a stopover to pick up the Torah. Why? Because the Torah is meant to be lived in the Land of Israel, not in the wilderness of Sinai, or England, or America, or France. The goal of Judaism is not just receiving the Torah, but rather to live a life of Torah in Israel. That’s what the Exodus was all about, as the verse clearly states when we were still in Egypt: *“I will bring you up out of the afflictions of Egypt to a Land flowing with milk and honey” (Shemot, 3:17).*

In upcoming blogs, with G-d’s help, we will learn more about our connection to *Eretz Yisrael*. In the meantime, read this blog over and over until it sinks in. Remember: It isn’t the commentary of Tzvi Fishman. It’s Moses explaining the Torah. If you don’t believe me, ask any fourth grader.

Fun Passover Quiz

1. If Jonathan Pollard were freed from prison today, he would want to spend Passover this year in Washington D.C., in Toronto, or in the Land of Israel?
2. If Rashi came back to life, he would want to spend Passover this year in Paris, in Brooklyn, or in the Land of Israel?
3. If we could ask Moses where is the best place to celebrate Passover this year, he would answer in Cairo, in the Sinai Desert, or in the Land of Israel?
4. If *Mashiach* revealed himself this week, he would want to spend Passover on a cruise ship in the Caribbean, at a swank Catskills Hotel, or in the Land of Israel?
5. If all of the Jews who were slaughtered in the Holocaust could have spent their last *Seder* in a different place, they would have preferred to stay right where they were, spend the holiday in Berlin, or in the Land of Israel?
6. If the Spies in the wilderness were given another chance to say where they wanted to live, they would still choose to remain in the wilderness, immigrate to America, or journey on to the Land of Israel?
7. If a creature from outer space wanted to experience the most joyous Passover *Seder* on Earth, he would land his spaceship in Brooklyn, at Brandeis University, or in the Land of Israel?

8. If a gentile wanted to experience the most genuine Passover *Seder* he could, he would make arrangements to be in Monsey, at a Miami Beach Hotel, or in the Land of Israel?

9. What would make *Hashem* the happiest – that all of His children celebrated the Seder in Brooklyn, or in five star luxury resort hotels around the globe, with golf courses, tennis courts, swimming pools, international *glatt* kosher cuisine, and guest lectures on *Yiddishkeit*, or in the Land of Israel?

10. Where would you rather spend Passover this year, in the exile or in the Land of the Jews?

If you answered the Land of Israel to all 10 questions, your head and your heart are in the right place. Now all you have to do is get the rest of you over here.

Holy Popcorn Balls

Today's guest blogger is Moshe himself. In this age of instant satisfaction, highlighted by TV and the Internet, a lot of people don't have the patience to read the Torah portion each week, so here's a condensed version of the beginning of the Book of *Devarim*. After reading these verses, if anyone still has doubts where *Hashem* wants the Jewish People to live, he should print out 100 copies, crumple them up and eat them, as if they were giant popcorn balls of holiness from the Land of Israel.

Here goes:

*"The Lord our God spoke to us in Horeb, saying, You have dwelt long enough at this mountain. Turn and journey, and come to the mountain of the Amorites and to all its neighboring places, in the plain, on the mountain, and in the lowland, and in the south and by the seashore, **THE LAND** of the Canaanites, and the Lebanon, until the great river, the Euphrates River."*

*"See, I have set **THE LAND** before you; come and possess **THE LAND** which the Lord swore to your forefathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them and their descendants after them."*

*"Behold, the Lord, your God, has set **THE LAND** before you; go up and possess it, as the Lord, God of your fathers has spoken to you; you shall neither fear nor be dismayed."*

*"Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as the Lord, my God, commanded me, to do so in the midst of **THE LAND** to which you are coming to possess."*

*“And the Lord was angry with me because of you, and He swore that I would not cross the Jordan and that I would not come into **THE GOOD LAND** the Lord, your God, is giving you as an inheritance.”*

*“For I will die in this **LAND**; I will not cross the Jordan. You, however, will cross, and you will possess **THIS GOOD LAND**.”*

*“And you shall observe His statutes and His commandments, which I command you this day, that it may be well with you and your children after you, and that you may prolong your days upon **THE LAND** which the Lord your God gives you forever.”*

*“In all the way which the Lord, your God, has commanded you, you shall go, in order that you may live and that it may be well with you, and so that you may prolong your days in **THE LAND** you will possess.”*

*“And you shall, [therefore,] hearken, O Israel, and be sure to perform, so that it will be good for you, and so that you may increase exceedingly, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, spoke to you, a **LAND** flowing with milk and honey.”*

*“And you shall do what is proper and good in the eyes of the Lord, in order that it may be well with you, and that you may come and possess **THE GOOD LAND** which the Lord swore to your forefathers, to drive out all your enemies from before you, as the Lord has spoken.”*

*“And the Lord gave signs and wonders, great and terrible, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes. And he brought us out of there, in order that He might bring us and give us **THE LAND** which He swore to our fathers.”*

*“And He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your soil, your grain, your wine, and your oil, the offspring of your cattle and the choice of your flocks, in **THE LAND** which He swore to your forefathers to give you.*

*“Every commandment that I command you this day you shall keep to do, that you may live and multiply, and come and possess **THE LAND** that the Lord swore to your forefathers.”*

*“For the Lord your God is bringing you to a good **LAND**, a **LAND** with brooks of water, fountains and depths, that emerge in valleys and mountains, a **LAND** of wheat and barley, vines and figs and pomegranates, a **LAND** of oil-producing olives and honey, a **LAND** in which you will eat bread without scarcity, you will lack nothing in it, a **LAND** whose stones are iron, and out of whose mountains you will hew copper.”*

*“And you will eat and be sated, and you shall bless the Lord, your God, for **THE GOOD LAND** He has given you.”*

As we have previously written, this last verse is the basis of “*Birkat HaMazone*,” the blessing of thanks which we recite after eating meals with bread. When we thank G-d for the land, the Torah isn’t referring to America, or Australia, or England. We thank G-d for giving us the Land of Israel.

So, enjoy your popcorn. Remember, my dear Diaspora brothers, print out 100 copies, crumple them up and eat them. These are Moshe’s teachings. Digest them well.

Valley of Dry Bones

On Holocaust Memorial Day, we are reminded of the famous *Haftorah* of the “Valley of Dry Bones” which we read during *Pesach* (Ezekiel, 37:1-14).

The valley of dry, lifeless bones which the Prophet Ezekiel envisions is a metaphor for the Jewish People in exile. G-d instructs Ezekiel to breathe life into the bones, and behold, the bones gather together and come to life!

How do the dry bones of come to life? Through the national restoration of the Jewish People in the Land of Israel. As the prophecy relates:

“So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up on their feet, an exceeding great army. Then He said to me, Son of man, these bones are the whole House of Israel Behold O My People, I will open your graves, and cause you to come out of your graves, and bring you into the Land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the L-rd, when I have opened your graves, O My People, and have brought you up out of your graves, and I shall put My spirit in you, and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own Land; then you shall know that I the L-rd have spoken and performed it, says the L-rd.”

This prophecy came to pass in our time with the resurrection of the Jewish People, out from the graveyards of the Holocaust, to the rebirth of the Jewish Nation in the Land of Israel.

But the message of this prophecy is not limited to the Holocaust alone. The Prophet is teaching us that the entire Diaspora is a grave. Outside

of the Land of Israel, the Jewish People are dry, lifeless bones. What are these bones? The commandments of the Torah which we carry off with us into exile. Denuded of our Land and our national format, the commandments are all we have left. With only these bones, we are a skeleton of a nation. In the exile, we are stripped of the muscles, sinews, and flesh of our nationhood. In the Diaspora, no matter where it is, and how pretty it may seem, Jewish communities are mere piles of bones without our own Land, without our own government, without our own army, without our own national life. Dry, lifeless bones.

Only in the Land of Israel do the Jewish People come to life. Only in the Land of Israel can our bones be dressed in muscles and flesh and a vibrant and growing national body.

On Holocaust Day, in memory of our murdered brethren, may this be a lesson for all of us.

E.T. Wants to Go Home

The very first time I visited Israel, I was overwhelmed, thank G-d, with the crystal-clear recognition that if I seriously wanted to live a Jewish life and get close to G-d, Israel was the place to be. This awareness was so powerful and clear, there was no room for speculation or doubt. The people were Jewish, Hebrew was the language, the highway signs were in Hebrew, advertisements were in Hebrew, the radio news was in Hebrew, it was the Land of the Bible, with Jerusalem, the Old City, Shilo, Hevron, Bet-El, Elon Moreh, the Dead Sea, Tiberias, Safed, with the gravesites of our holy forefathers, Prophets, and Sages, a Jewish Prime Minister, a Jewish army, kosher food everywhere, and more *yeshivot* and synagogues than anywhere else in the world combined. The list goes on and on. In addition, everything was holy. The people, the buses, the hillsides, the buildings, the air, everything was saturated with an aura of holiness and the feeling that G-d is present every minute.

In contrast, when I returned to New York, I crashed. There was no holiness there at all. Everything was gentile. The people, the language, the architecture, the culture, the television programs and politics were all gentile. For the first time in my thirty years in America, after having stepped foot in the Jewish homeland, when I returned to New York I felt like a stranger in a strange land. Even the air was missing. There was no holiness in it at all. I felt like I couldn't breathe. And the feeling that I had experienced in Israel, that G-d was ever present, simply did not exist.

As days passed, the feeling of emptiness and strangeness grew stronger, as if I were some kind of extra terrestrial E.T. stranded down on earth. Desperate to feel something Jewish, I went to a Woody Allen movie. I listened to Carlebach tapes. I walked through Little Italy and Chinatown to the Lower East Side to get a kosher meal at Shmulka Bernstein's Deli. Finally, I decided to take a subway ride to Crown Heights in Brooklyn, figuring that for sure I'd find holiness there. But when I walked up the stairs of the underground station to the street, I found myself in a neighborhood like any other. Here, too, there was absolutely no holiness in the air. Even as I walked into the nearby Lubavitch neighborhood, my Geiger counter picked up no crackling of holiness, as if the battery were dead. Suddenly, there were a lot of religious Jews on the street, but there was no holiness in the air. Compared to the towering holiness of the Holy Land, the Brooklyn *shtetl* was like the empty back lot of a Hollywood set. Only when I saw the *Rebbe*, did the sensation of holiness return. A holiness exuded from him like a laser, sanctifying everything it touched. But the neighborhood itself, with all of its *Hasidim* and Jewish life, couldn't compare with The Land of Israel at all.

The point is, if a Jew really wants to get closer to G-d and to live a full Jewish life, Israel is the one and only place. Anywhere else, even in the most Ultra-Orthodox ghetto in New York, it simply doesn't come close to the towering holiness of *Eretz Yisrael*. For two thousand years, before we had the State of Israel, there was nothing we could do, so we had to make the best out of the exile, and the Jews who clung to Judaism were true heroes and champions of faith. But now that we have our own thriving Jewish country, how can we not come?

Holy Roller

As usual, after the traditional *Yom HaAtzmaut* barbecue with the family, I went rolling in the Holy Land to demonstrate my love for the Land. Sometimes, it's rolling down the sand dunes in Ashdod, sometimes in the desert of Judea, or in the Negev, sometimes in the aromatic cattle fields of the Golan.

The sanctity of the Land of Israel is often misunderstood. Some people think that the holiness of the Land derives from the special commandments concerning the Land which are only performed in Israel. Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook would explain the error of this way of thinking. He emphasized that *Eretz Yisrael* is holy, in and of itself. As the classic book, "*The Kuzari*," makes clear, for this reason alone, every Jew should long to live here:

"Your forefathers chose it as their abode in preference to their birthplaces, and lived there as strangers, rather than as citizens in their own country. They did this even at a time when the Divine Presence was not yet visible, and when the country was full of unchastity, impurity, and idol worship. Your Forefathers, however, had no other desire than to remain there" (Kuzari,2:23).

Because of the holiness of the Land, there are special commandments that apply to it, and not visa versa (See also, "Chatam Sofer, Responsa," Yoreh Deah 234).

In the Talmud, at the end of tractate "*Ketubot*," the love of the Land by the Sages is expressed:

“Rabbi Abba kissed the stones of Acco, and Rabbi Chia Bar Gamda rolled himself in its dust” (Ketubot 112B).

They did this to actualize the verse, *“For your servants desire her stones and cherished her very dust”* (Tehillim, 102:15).

Notice that Rabbi Abba did not kiss the ground, over which the special commandments of the Land are performed. He kissed the boulders to emphasize the inherent holiness of the Land itself, even its stones.

Hotel California

Last night, my former agent called from Hollywood once again. He found me a gig writing a new TV sit-com about three homosexuals, temporarily called “Three’s a Crowd.” I get a guaranteed 3 million dollars, spread over three years, even if the show never gets on the air. So I’m moving back to LA.

Why should I work at odd writing jobs in Israel for peanuts, when I can earn a million a year? Plus, some of our talkbackers are right - living in Israel is dangerous. To tell you the truth, there are a lot of advantages in living in the States. For one thing, my kids won’t have to go into the army. Why should they? I’m an American citizen. Why should they have to put their lives on the line for Israel? And the Jewish Day School in LA is one of the best, with discounts on family golf and tennis memberships. True, the Federation swimming pool is mixed, but I just won’t look at the women, I promise.

I’ve assured my wife that we’ll move back to Israel when the Israelis get their act together, when there is peace, when the country is ruled by a Torah government, when you can make as much money as you can in the States, and when *Moshiach comes*, may it be soon. In the meantime, I’ll do my share in rebuilding the Jewish Homeland by clicking on to *Arutz 7* and sending in hard-hitting talkbacks. And I’ll be sure to send a check now and then to all my old friends.

So, things have come full circle. Good-bye Holy Land. Hello Hollywood. I’m not ashamed. There is a lot of important work to be done in the Diaspora. Maybe I’ll open a Kabbalah Nightclub on Sunset Strip to keep my hand in *kiruv*.

True, I'll miss the *Kotel*, but the temple we'll be joining in Beverly Hills has a wall with styrofoam Western Wall boulders that look just like the real thing. I suppose I'll miss G-d, too, but friends back in LA assure me that I'll get over that feeling in no time. Hollywood, here I come!

In the meantime, Happy *Purim*!

I Love Tel Aviv

My wife and I went to Tel Aviv this morning to pay a condolence call. The family sitting “*shiva*” lives near the seashore, a few blocks from Dizengoff Street, so afterwards, we strolled around to enjoy the summery weather and change of atmosphere.

What’s amazing about Tel Aviv is that everyone speaks Hebrew! At first glance, it doesn’t seem like the most religious place in the country, but everyone there, no matter how weird or secular he looks, speaks the Holy Tongue. Even a drunk who approached us for a handout spoke to us in Hebrew! The only people we met there who didn’t speak Hebrew was a busload of American kids from the Birthright program.

Tel Aviv is filled with beautiful boutiques, sidewalk cafes, theaters, and art galleries. Its architecture along the seaside is very modern and creative. It has a bohemian, Paris-like feeling about it. My wife noted that the women were very beautiful and fashionably dressed, though modesty wasn’t one of their strong points. I kept my glance down at my shoes, so I can’t confirm her report. I know there are many devout Diasporians who are always screaming “*Gevalt!* The immodesty in Israel is terrible! *Gevalt!* There are so many heretics there! *Gevalt!* Tel Aviv is worse than Las Vegas!”

There is an interesting Midrash in “*Yalkut Shimoney, Eichah*” that describes G-d’s great anguish that His people are in exile, dwelling amongst the gentiles. “*Gevalt!*” G-d moans. “If only My children were with Me in *Eretz Yisrael*, even if they contaminate My Land with their sins.”

Our Sages tell us that G-d cries out at midnight with pain that His children are in foreign lands. “Woe to the father that has exiled his children!” He says. In contrast, G-d is happy when His children are in Israel. Look what He has done in returning us to our borders! The city of Tel Aviv began as a sand dune. Today it is a booming, modern metropolis, spreading for miles and miles in every direction. G-d has done all this!

I know there are people who aren’t happy with this state of affairs. They don’t agree with the way G-d is bringing about the Redemption. If they were G-d, they would do things differently. For one thing, they would limit the Redemption to religious Jews only. But G-d loves all Jews, the religious and the not-yet religious. So, in His great love, He decided to give the secular Zionists the great *mitzvah* of resettling and rebuilding the Land of Israel after an exile of nearly two thousand years, a *mitzvah* that is equal in weight to all of the commandments of the Torah!

G-d loves Tel Aviv, too! Look how He has built it up out of the sand dunes to being such a thriving, dynamic city! I can’t wait to go back there to visit!

The Caged Lion

We missed devoting a blog to Rabbi Kook on his *yahrtzeit* last week. In addition to having been a master in all disciplines of Torah, and a great visionary, Rabbi Kook also wrote many powerful and inspiring poems, expressing his passionate yearning for G-d. Here for your enjoyment is a short fable he penned. Unfortunately, my translation can't compare to the beauty and depth of the original Hebrew, the rich imagery and multiple nuances. But the symbolism and message are obvious.

The Caged Lion

1

THE old lion is broken

Tired from his many hunters

Trapped in a narrow cage

He remembers times from his childhood

Memories of freedom

The valor of the forest.

His cubs were born in captivity

Their souls don't feel his weariness

Yet their souls haven't grown.

They haven't been broken by the enemy

Because they haven't seen battle
And the valor of the forest they don't know.

Though the cage is narrow
It doesn't oppress them so much,
It inhibits the wildness of their youth,
But the cubs don't moan
Over this small matter,
And the glow in their eyes
Over this doesn't darken.

The cubs are angry with their father,
Why is he so sunken in his thoughts
To have forgotten about life?
There still is room to frolic a little
Even in this narrow cage.

The children are astounded
When they look upon the aged lion
So stooped over and sighing.

2

ONCE the old lion awakened
And told his tale to the playful youngsters,
“There is a world filled with light
A place filled with liberty and freedom
A forest of great expanses,
And towering trees
How pleasant are those cedars of G-d!
The scents of the forest restore the soul
A myriad of living creatures dwell within
And everything is enlivened with the pleasures of freedom.

“And when I was your age, children,
It was there that I ruled with pride and strength
All of the forest’s warriors bowed before me.
And if not for my pursuers who shattered my bones,
And if not for this narrow cage

I would still now be ruling in the forest
And you too would be filled with freedom and pride.”

These words came forth from the old one
And the youths ceased to frolic.
Instead of joy in their eyes
A flash of revenge shone in them,
Eyes filled with fire and blood,
And with an embittered spirit and hidden rage
They tried to break
The narrow cage.

3

THE soul of mighty lions roared inside the cubs
And their eyes also saw
With all the same force
The kingdom of the forest.
The longings in them grew stronger
To reach the open expanses,

To the place where their old father ruled.

They couldn't keep still in the cage

The scent of the oak trees of the forest

Filled their nostrils and lungs,

The colors of budding flowers

Held their hearts captive

Their spirits didn't fall

And they didn't groan

Like the elder

Whose bones had broken,

And the light of his life turned gloomy

Because of the oppression of his captors

Who turned his world upside down.

And with a yearning of spirit

Like billowing flames

Their hearts yearned for the forest.

4

“IF in sincerity and innocence
The forest is loved,”
The old broken lion once said,
“Then the soul of proud lions
Still beats within you,
And this the narrow cage
Won’t be your home
For you will always belong to the forest kingdom.”

The words of the elder
Strengthened the hearts of the youth,
And with the power and valor of young lions
They began to smash at the cage’s bars
With their claws, their teeth, and their roars
Frightening the captors
From their routine guard.
And with a fierce spirit raging with love for the forest

They broke and shattered the walls of the narrow cage.

5

SEEING the boldness of the cubs

The old broken lion was filled with courage,

And a spark of the proud lion inside him was kindled anew.

Taking a place in the front of his sons

All of his being filled with valor,

And together with a spirit of freedom

They fled to a place with freedom and light.

Hearing the roar of lions, their captors trembled in fear,

And with a proud spirit the lions went on their way

Until they came to the place of the oaks

To the castle of the lions

As it had been from time immemorial.

It was as if the old lion regained his youth

And his broken insides

Became bonded together in joy.

And he together with his cubs
Spoke victoriously to their enemies at the forest's edge
And all the lions returned
To raise up the forest kingdom.

That's the end of the fable. Like the lions in Rabbi Kook's poem, may we also find the longing for freedom, and the courage to shatter the cage of our long exile, to make our way joyously back to the glorious forest kingdom from whence we came.

Death of British Jewry

What are you waiting for, old chaps? How many boycotts do you need to see the writing on the wall? It's time to come to Israel. Let's face it – the British hate the Jews. Except for a few righteous souls like Balfour, way back in the good old days, when the English Parliament still had a respect for the Bible and recognized that G-d gave the Land of Israel to the Children of Israel, the British have constantly betrayed us.

Remember the White Paper, when they refused to let Jews immigrate to Palestine, even though they were supposed to be here under a mandate to help us set up our own Jewish State? How many boatloads of refugees did they turn away at our shores? How many Jews ended up dying? Wake up, old chaps. Don't be fooled by their fight against the Nazis in World War Two. They did that to save their country, not to save the Jews. And their partnership with America in the war against Iraq was just to protect their oil interests, not to protect us.

Of course, the British hate us. Among other things, **they** want to be known as the people of the book, and it irks them that we are. True, they have Shakespeare and Dickens and Henry James, but we have the Bible, and nothing tops that. It was a devastating blow to the Englishman's ego when the Americans proved to be smarter and more successful than the Brits, but when the Jews in the tiny State of Israel ousted the great British Empire, that was an unpardonable sin. Plus, as everyone knows, if it weren't for the Jews, Scotland Yard wouldn't have to worry so much about Al Qaeda, since we are the ones who cause all of the problems in the Middle East. It isn't just the British professors, and journalists, and doctors, and workers, and trade unions who hate

us. They all hate us. So why, old chaps, do you still want to stay? You can get tea with milk in Israel.

But that isn't the only reason to worry. A recently published survey reveals that British Jewry is dying. Among the findings:

"A higher proportion of British Jews than in almost any other religious or ethnic group live in single-person households. This, together with the large number of mixed Jewish-gentile households, compels a rethink of the nature of the Jewish community, according to the researchers."

"More young Jews live alone, more couples live together without children and/or marriage, and more households contain both Jewish and non-Jewish members than ever before. The picture is further complicated by the numbers of people who are divorced, separated or remarried."

68% of those cohabiting had a partner who was not Jewish.



This means that the Jewish family unit in England is disappearing and that interethnic households are on the rise. Since the Jewish birthrate is

swiftly declining, if the trend continues, then Al-Qaeda won't have anything to do in England, and Scotland Yard can go back to catching dogs.

So, come to Israel, old chaps, while you still are Jews. Our family dentist is from London, and he is a wonderful fellow. And our family doctor from Manchester is brilliant, witty, dedicated to Torah, and a trustworthy physician to boot. If they made it here, so can you.

Jewish Heart Test

At the center of the miracle of *Hanukah* stood the *Beit HaMikdash* – the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. The *Beit HaMikdash* was the House of G-d on Earth, the center of Jewish life and worship. Throughout the year, in all of our prayers, we pray for the Temple's rebuilding. The yearning for the Temple's rebuilding is synonymous with our yearning for Jerusalem, for the coming of *Mashiach*, and the ingathering of all of our scattered exiles. Just as the *Beit HaMikdash* is the heart of the Jewish Nation, the yearning for it should be in the heart of every Jew as well.

Here is a simple test to see if your Jewish heart is in spiritually healthy, yearning for the Temple the way that it should.

How many of you observe the following practice, as set down in the "*Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*," the basic handbook to Jewish Law?

After the destruction of the Second Temple, our Sages, of blessed memory, ordained that on every joyous occasion, we must remember the destruction of the Holy Temple, as it is written, "*If I forget thee O Jerusalem, may I forget my right hand...if I set not Jerusalem above my highest joy*" (Tehillim, 137:5).

This, for instance, is the reason a glass is broken during a Jewish wedding ceremony, to recall the destruction of Jerusalem, and to remind us to set the rebuilding of the Jewish Nation in Israel over our private joys, even the joy of our wedding.

The *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* continues:

"The Sages have decreed that no Jew should build for himself a house painted and decorated in royal style; nor should he paint the entire

interior of the house, but he may plaster it, paint it, and leave unpainted the area of a square cubit opposite the entrance, commemorative of the destruction of the Temple.”

What’s the situation in your home? Have you left a square unpainted in commemoration of the Temple?

Then, of course, there’s *Tisha B’Av*, the ninth day of the month of Av, the day which commemorates the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem. It’s an all-day fast, like on *Yom Kippur*. Jews sit on the floor of the synagogue in mourning, reading lamentations. Do you?

Our Sages tell us that someone who mourns over the destruction of Jerusalem will merit to participate in the joy of its rebuilding.

So, be healthy, my good friends, and take good care of your hearts.

.006 Percent

First, a big *yasher koach* to the “*Nefesh B’Nefesh*” organization for its wonderful work in helping Jews make *aliyah* to Israel. In addition to helping people carry out the supreme *mitzvah* of living In the Land of Israel, which our Sages say is equal in weight to all the commandments in the Torah, they are raising the spirit of the nation. Who doesn’t get teary-eyed seeing hundreds of new *olim* happily descend down the ramp way of El Al jets to begin a new life in Israel? May *Hashem* grant all of the newcomers success and everlasting joy in their exalted religious endeavor.

Having stated our unreserved praise for these brave, idealistic *olim* and the assistance that “*Nefesh B’Nefesh*” provides, we have to ask – where are the rest of the denizens of the Diaspora?

I have never been much of a mathematician, but I punched a few numbers into my calculator and came out with an eye-opening figure. To make the calculation simple, let’s say that 3000 Jews are making *aliyah* this year from North America. Out of the 5 million Jews still living there, that comes to .006 percent. Not even a tenth of one percent!

Those jumbo El Al jets look really big, and they are really impressive rolling down the runway toward a welcoming crowd of happy people waving a sea of blue and white flags. The pictures and publicity are great. But wait a minute! Where are the rest of the North American Jews?

If the NASA space program succeeded in returning only .006 percent of its astronauts from outer space, you could be sure a lot of heads would roll. And if a hospital reported that only .006 percent left the hospital

on their feet, the hospital's director would soon be out of work. Or if only .006 percent of students graduated from a certain college, the Dean would be out of a job.

The point is that something is very wrong with Jewish education in North America if only .006 of its Jews are making *aliyah* per year. Why are we waving flags? Instead, we should be crying.

As we mentioned in a recent blog, the goal of Judaism is for the Jewish People to live a life of Torah in *Eretz Yisrael*. It is through this NATIONAL sanctification of *Hashem* that the light of G-d is brought into the world and His Kingship is established over all of the globe, as the verse says, "*From Zion will go forth Torah, and the word of G-d from Jerusalem.*"

In his book, "*Orot*," Rabbi Kook writes: "The concept of Judaism in the Diaspora will only find true strength through the depth of its involvement in *Eretz Yisrael*. Only through its longing for *Eretz Yisrael* will Diaspora Judaism consistently receive its inherent qualities. The yearning for Salvation gives the Judaism of the Diaspora its power of stamina; whereas the Judaism of *Eretz Yisrael* is the Salvation itself (*Orot*, 1:1).

This means that the goal of Jewish education in the exile must not be the strengthening of Jewish life in the exile, but rather strengthening the Jew's connection to *Eretz Yisrael*. The goal of Jewish education in the exile must be to increase the yearning to be saved from the exile, not to prolong it. The goal of Jewish education in the Diaspora must be to yearn for Salvation, which means salvation from the Diaspora itself. What is this Salvation? Rabbi Kook tells us – the Judaism of *Eretz Yisrael*.

The reason that the *aliyah* rate from North America is a dismal .006 percent of its Jews is because the Jewish education there fosters the strengthening of Judaism in America and Canada. In a past blog, I already gave two clear examples of this, which I will repeat here.

Once, when visiting my parents in Florida before they moved to Israel, I noticed a flyer on the bulletin board of the local Orthodox synagogue. Its headline invited the congregation to come on a trip with the rabbi to “our nation’s capital.” The photograph on the flyer was the Capitol Building in Washington D.C., and not Jerusalem. Since when, I wondered, had Washington become the capital of the Jewish People?

On another occasion, I had to be in Toronto to raise funds for a yeshiva. While I was waiting to speak in one of the large Orthodox synagogues, I glanced at the weekly Jewish journal. On the front page was a photo of the Toronto landmark skyscraper that looks like a needle. The caption read: “Looking Forward to the Next Decade of Jewish Life in Toronto.” I was startled. After all, a Jew is supposed to yearn for the next decade of Jewish life in Jerusalem. This is what we pray for three times a day. And, “Next Year in Jerusalem” is what we all say at the conclusion of the Passover *Seder* and our *Yom Kippur* prayers. Are we supposed to mean it, or are we just mouthing the words?

At the risk of upsetting the whole establishment of Jewry, a word about “Birthright,” the program that brings Jewish college students on a free visit to Israel to strengthen their feelings of Jewish identity. Certainly, there are many praiseworthy things that can be said about this endeavor. Nonetheless, let me point out a matter that coincides with what we have been saying. The youthful participants in the Birthright

program are not brought to Judea and Samaria during their tours. This is something that the United States Department of State considers a travel risk, causing insurance companies to balk. Now if the organizers of this program adhere to what the State Department advises in order to show that they are faithful Americans, and thus bypass visiting Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Hevron, why should any of these young people embrace their Jewishness as their first and foremost identity? If they are full-fledged, faithful Americans, then it follows that it is perfectly OK to marry fellow Americans, even if they aren't Jews. After all, what's the difference? Americans are Americans, and all Americans are equal, whether they be Eskimos, Puerto Ricans, Catholics, or Jews. The point is that without educating these kids that the Land of Israel is not just a cool place to visit, but rather their true homeland as Jews, in the long run, after the ten-day fix fades away, their identity as Americans is sure to win out in the end.

As long as Jewish education in the Diaspora emphasizes the strengthening of Jewish life and Jewish identity in the Diaspora, it is bound to fail. It is education toward extinction. Whether through assimilation or persecution, the future of Diaspora Judaism is doomed. For 2000 years, we had to strive to keep our communities strong, since we had no other place to be. But with the establishment of *Medinat Yisrael*, everything changed. Jewish educators in the Diaspora have to stop sticking their heads in the sand and face this reality. Education that strives to build Jewish life in the exile is blind to the future. As I said, I am not a mathematician, but any statistician will tell you that with the low Jewish birthrate and with the steady rise in assimilation, Diaspora Jewry is on a drastic decline. In thirty years, fifty years, one hundred

years, it is destined to disappear. This is how it should be. The exile is not meant to last forever. This is what we yearn for in our prayers:

“Sound the great shofar for our freedom (from the Diaspora) and lift up the banner to bring our exiles together (in Israel) and assemble us together from the four corners of the earth to our Land. Blessed art Thou, O L-rd, who gathers the dispersed of Thy people Israel (to the Land of Israel).”

Amen.

Break on Throuuuuugh!

Where were you when the lights went out? I am old enough to remember the famous 1977 New York City “Blackout” when all the lights went out in the Big Apple. In fact, I am so old, I remember the great blackout in Egypt, when a thick thick darkness covered that polluted immoral land - except for Goshen where the Jews had light. But it wasn’t good news for the Jews. In his commentary to the Torah, Rashi informs us that 80% of the Jews in Egypt were stricken to death during the plague of darkness because they didn’t want to leave the cesspools of Egypt and go to the Land flowing with milk and honey. They wanted to remain in the strange and vile land, always trying to please the Egyptians and be accepted as one of the bunch. Embarrassed at His children for turning their backs on the Promised Land, the wonderful gift that He had bequeathed to their forefathers, *Hashem* brought a three-day blackout over the land of Egypt so the gentiles wouldn’t see the embarrassment of His people refusing to obey His command. In the thick darkness, while no one could see the disgrace, *Hashem* smote that tragic, misguided 80% and hurried with their burial so that the *goyim* wouldn’t be witness to the incredible *boosha*.

Truly, it was a terrible blow. There were Jewish doctors who died. And very intelligent Jewish professors. And top-notch Jewish businessmen and artists. And talented writers who could string quotes together about all sorts of things. Smart people who just didn’t get the message. They didn’t want to. They wanted to stay in the fleshpot of Egypt. In the darkness. In their darkness. Not even Moshe could open their eyes. Oh,

how he tried! Day after day. But they didn't want to listen. Not to Moshe and not to *Hashem*. And certainly not to Tzvi Fishman.

Thank G-d, I made it out of the darkness with the remaining 20%. Thank G-d for opening my eyes. Thank G-d for enabling me to see. Thank G-d, I trusted in *Hashem* and in Moshe. True, things got pretty scary at the sea, but with G-d's help, we made it through to the other side, to the other side, to the other side.

Brothers! Sisters! "Break on through to the other side." Break on through to the other side! Break on through to the light. Break out of the darkness. Break on through. Break on through. Break on throuuuuuuuugh!!!!!!!!!! Yeeeeaaaaaaahh!!!!!!

Why Bother to Rebuild?

Thousands of Jews have been left homeless as the once carefree California has erupted into a blazing inferno. Even *Chabad* houses, the last line of defense of Diaspora Jewry, have been evacuated. Here's a news item depicting the tragedy of one of the Jewish victims.

NEW YORK (JTA) -- "I worked all my life for this house," Daniel Okonsky said in a call from his cell phone on Tuesday afternoon. "I was able to build it, to maintain it -- and now there is nothing."

Okonsky was speaking from the Downtown Sheraton in San Diego, where he has been staying with his family since they evacuated their home Sunday in the face of wildfires that have ravaged southern California.

When he returned to his home Monday, there was nothing left.

He has notified his insurance company of the loss, but is not sure what will happen next. "I have never lived through something like this," he said. "I have no procedure to follow. It's not something you experience every day. You have a house where you raise a family, and now there is nothing left."

In other news affecting the Jewish community, more than 20 *Chabad* centers in Southern California have been evacuated due to the raging fires around the region, said a spokesman for West Coast *Chabad*.

[End of the news article.]

Dear Jews of California – the people of Israel are with you in your sorrow. But as you contemplate the task of rebuilding, why waste your

time rebuilding your lives in California. Your tragedy will only happen again. Whether by fire, or earthquake, or persecution, or assimilation, the future of Diaspora Jewry is doomed. What point is there in rebuilding your houses and *shuls* in *galut* when you can build new homes and *Chabad* houses in Israel?

Just like a Chinaman belongs in China, and an Eskimo belongs in Alaska, a Jew belongs in Israel. Nowhere is South California mentioned in the Torah. G-d told Avraham to go to Israel. He promised the Land to Yitzhak and Yaacov. Our forefathers lived there even though there were idol-worshipping enemies in the Land. After a harsh exile in Egypt, G-d told Moshe to bring the Jews home to Israel. All of the Torah comes to teach us that a Jew is to make the Land of Israel his home.

Brothers and sisters, the choice is before you. You can rebuild your private villas, and reconstruct your private swimming pools and private home Jacuzzis and gyms, or you can dedicate your lives to helping to rebuild the Jewish Nation in the Jewish Land, and thus become an active partner in the process of Redemption that is taking place across the sea.

Yes, there are dangers in Israel, too. There were dangers when *Hashem* told Avraham to move here. There were dangers when *Hashem* commanded Moshe and Joshua to bring the Jews to Israel out of their bondage in Egypt.

Hashem tests us through dangers. He tests our faith in Him and our love for Him through the dangers we have to overcome, and through the sacrifices we have to make on His behalf. This is how he builds us into being His people. He wants us to love Him completely, with all of our hearts, with all of our souls, with all of our might.

So, to all of the homeless David's and *Chabad* rabbis, wherever you may be, when you gaze at the ruins of your exile dreams, be happy. The exile isn't supposed to last forever. Come home to Israel. Your future is here.

Why Move to Israel?

Question:

We live in a thriving Orthodox community in Monsey, New York. It offers the best in Jewish education for our children, a wide gamut of synagogue activities for the whole family, Torah classes throughout the day, and real joy during the Jewish holidays, all of which foster a sense of Jewish identity and pride. Why should we move to Israel where the influence of the secular Israelis is so pervasive, and where our spiritual (and physical) wellbeing will be jeopardized?

Answer:

There aren't any spiritual dangers living in America? Is Monsey so hermetic that you don't feel the influence of the Christian culture that surrounds you? For instance, if you have to leave your *shtetl* at this time of year, aren't you immediately confronted by Santa Clauses and mangers? And if my memory serves me right, wasn't some synagogue in Monsey torched this past year, and a giant *Chabad* menorah vandalized? And aren't there also secular Jews in Monsey, and in the surrounding towns, and on the campuses where your children go off to college?

Furthermore, if you enjoy your life in the ghetto, we have dozens of Monsey-like communities in Israel that dwarf Monsey in size and in religious observance, places like Mea Shaarim, Geula, Ramot Dalet, Bucharim, Sanhedrin Muchevet, Romema, Har Nof, Bnei Brak, Betar Illit, Kfar Sefer, dozens of Orthodox *yishuvim* in *Yesha*, etc., etc. In almost every city in Israel, there are Orthodox neighborhoods which

offer everything you describe, with the added bonus of being in the Holy Land.

Don't make the mistake of underplaying the holiness of the Land of Israel. Nothing in the world compares to it. Just look at the Torah portions that we have been reading. When our forefather, Yaacov, awakes from his famous dream, he realizes that he is in the "House of G-d" and at the "Gateway to Heaven." Can Monsey boast that? And notice how the angels of the Land of Israel refuse to accompany Yaacov in his exile from the Land because of the spiritual impurity of the Diaspora. And our Sages teach us that on his return home to Israel, Yaacov feared Esav, even though Esav was a wicked man, and even though *Hashem* had promised to guard Yaacov, because all the time that Yaacov was away, Esav had the merit of observing the commandment of living in the Land of Israel, which is equal in weight to all of the commandments of the Torah.

But beyond these reasons for living in the Land of Israel, I am afraid that your understanding of Judaism is off the mark. Judaism isn't a private religion such as Christianity, Protestantism, and the like. Judaism is the NATIONAL CONSTITUTION of the Nation of Israel that is to be played out in Jerusalem and over the mountains and valleys of *Eretz Yisrael*. In addition to private individual commandments like *tzitzit*, *tefillin*, and keeping kosher, Judaism includes commandments for the Jewish Nation as a whole, like conquering and settling the Land of Israel, enlisting in the Jewish army, rebuilding the Temple, establishing the Sanhedrin and Jewish Monarchy, and keeping the agricultural *mitzvot* that are dependent on the Land.

The proper understanding of Judaism is that each individual Jew put his, or her, life in line with the goal of the Nation of Israel as a whole (the *Clal*), and not just live a private, ritual Judaism, practicing personal precepts, stripped of our national essence. The Jewish People are to establish the Kingdom of G-d on earth, and this can only be accomplished in our national format in the Land of Israel, as it says, *“For the Torah shall go forth from Zion, and the word of Hashem from Jerusalem.”*

To do this, the Jewish People must return in its entirety to Zion. This is the teaching of our Prophets, and the rebuilding of Israel has been the driving force of Jewish history over the last one-hundred-and-fifty years.

Take a look at our preliminary morning prayers to see that the goal of Judaism is to live a life of Torah in the Land of Israel, and not in Monsey, New York. After reciting the *“Akeida”*, we ask G-d to remember the Brit with our forefathers and return us to the Land of Israel. We repeat this request over and over in the following dozen verses, which all have the same plea: “Bring us back to our Land, bring us back to our Land, bring us back to our Land (these verses are omitted in many prayer books published in the Diaspora).

A little further on, after the preliminary recital of the *Shema*, we ask *Hashem* to sanctify His Name in the world by granting us salvation. What is this salvation? Salvation from the exile. “Gather our outcasts from the four corners of the earth so that all the inhabitants of the world will recognize and know that that You are the exalted and unique one G-d over all the kingdoms of the globe.” How is this great

sanctification of G-d to come about? Through our return to live in the Land of Israel.

To our great shame, we recite these verses, but fail to act on them. A Jew can hop on the train of Jewish destiny and join the ingathering, or he can make his last stop in Monsey, Melbourne, and Manchester, and become another nail in the coffin of *galut*.

The eyes of the whole world are focused on Israel because everyone knows that this is where history began, and this is where the unfolding saga of world history is destined to reach its climax. Let's face it. Can you imagine an international website frequented by hundreds of thousands of readers: Monsey National News?

And finally, you and your children may be living comfortable lives as Jews. But what will be with your grandchildren? Will they marry Jews? And if the gentiles turn against Monsey, as has happened so repeatedly in our past, who will protect you? The Monsey Police? They're gentiles, too.

That's why you should move to Israel.

Worms in the Apple

What do you do if you find a small worm sticking out of a beautiful apple? You cut the worm out and eat the rest of the apple. You don't have to throw the apple away because of the worm.

The same is true for *Medinat Yisrael*. You don't have to throw the State of Israel away because of the worms. You just have to work to get rid of the worms.

Imagine a country in the world where all traffic stops for 24 hours in reverence to G-d. A ridiculous fantasy, isn't it? But that's exactly what happens in Israel on *Yom Kippur*. For those 24 hours, the nation's true colors are seen. We are a nation that fears G-d. For those 24 hours, the whole world can see that the Name of G-d is called upon the Nation of Israel. For those 24 hours, the Name of G-d is sanctified in a national manner like nowhere else on earth. This is the true Israel.

Of course, come the next day, the evil inclination returns with full force, doing everything it can to prevent us from being who we truly are. But during those 24 hours when the Nation is fasting and praying, we reveal who we truly are, and what the Jewish State will be like in the near future.

As for the worms who seek to ruin this vision by painting everything as rotten, they are tiny, bothersome detractors that can simply be removed and thrown in the trash.

Just 65 years ago, the Jewish People were the scorn of humanity. The world stood by and watched as 6 million Jews were slaughtered. In the eyes of the gentiles, G-d was impotent to help His chosen Nation. In the

eyes of the gentiles, G-d had abandoned the Jews. The wholesale massacre seemed to prove the Christian doctrine that G-d had rejected the Jews and chosen the Christians instead. The Name of G-d was desecrated like it had never been before. In the eyes of the world, G-d was helpless and too weak to prevent the mass destruction. With the erasure of vast communities of His People, it was as if G-d Himself was erased from the world.

That was the case until the miraculous rebirth of the State of Israel. Suddenly, the whole world saw in astonishment that G-d was still very much alive. They saw in amazement and trembling that G-d had not abandoned His People. They saw that the word of G-d was eternal and real, and that the Prophets of Israel had spoken the truth. With the establishment of the State of Israel, the Vatican's doctrines of Christian supremacy exploded like a bubble. All of Islam's pompous proclamations of being the new chosen nation were shot full of holes. With the establishment of the State of Israel, G-d's Name and honor were restored, with the renewed honor of the Jews.

The State of Israel is proof that the G-d of the Torah is the one and only G-d, and that Israel is His Chosen Nation. That is the real reason that most of world is against Israel. They don't only want to erase Israel from the world – they want to erase G-d from the world, as well, so they can be free to continue in their orgies of whoredom, power, and fame.

But the promises of G-d to the Jews via the Prophets of Israel will not be thwarted, no matter how hard the gentiles try. And the way that G-d

has chosen to bring about the restoration of His Name in the world, as ruler over all of the Earth, is through the vehicle of the State of Israel.

It is G-d working incognito through the State of Israel that has made possible the restoration of Jewish sovereignty over the Land of Israel after 2000 years of foreign occupation and exile. It is G-d working incognito through the State of Israel that has made possible the ingathering of millions of Jews back to the Land of Israel, just as our Prophets foresaw. It is G-d working incognito through the State of Israel that has made possible the rebuilding of Jerusalem. It is G-d working incognito through the State of Israel that has made possible the miraculous rebirth of the desert land. It is G-d working incognito through the State of Israel that has made possible Israel's meteoric rise within 60 short years to being a major world power. It is G-d working incognito through the State of Israel that has made possible the unparalleled quantity of Torah that is being learned all over the country. It is G-d working incognito through the State of Israel that has made possible the clear and irrefutable recognition that Israel is the Jewish People's only salvation from the worms of assimilation eating away at the Diaspora.

Every Jew must thank G-d for giving us the State of Israel. Instead of concentrating on the worms, go ahead and enjoy the apple.

Warning! Xmas!

Let's try to wrap up our pre-Xmas warnings. Be sure to stay away from their parties, non-kosher wine, frivolity, and kissing Suzy under the mistletoe. If there's a Xmas party at the office, tell them you have a stomach ache. On Xmas day, keep as far away from their festivities as possible. Since Christians are considered idolaters, on their holiday it's best not to have any business with them at all (Rambam, Laws of Idol Worship, Ch.9, 1-4).

The prohibition against idol worship tops the list of the Ten Commandments. No one is allowed to make or worship a graven image. As the Rambam explains, "The essential principle concerning idolatry is that people are not to worship anything created – neither angel, planet, star, the elements, or something derived from them."

This includes Buddhas, Hindu monkey gods, totem poles, statues of Mary and Jezeus, and the like. I would post a few photos in illustration, but it is even forbidden to gaze upon the picture of an idolatrous figure, as it says, "*Turn not after their idols*" (Vayikra, 19:4. See Rambam, 2:2, loc. cited).

In Rabbi Kook's writings on Christianity, he explains that it began as a break-away sect of Judaism which grew in influence and ultimately led the world astray with its doctrines. He categorizes it as idol worship, and says that its founder brought the majority of the world to err by serving a god other than the Almighty. By abandoning the *mitzvot*, Christianity enshrouded the world in a seemingly legitimate offshoot of idol worship. While imitating many of Judaism's values and beliefs, Christianity actually led the world away from the true service of G-d.

Referring to Christianity's renegade founder, the Rambam writes: "Can there be a greater stumbling block than this one? All of the Prophets spoke of the Messiah as the redeemer of Israel, and its savior, who would gather the dispersed and strengthen their observance of the commandments, while this one caused the annihilation of Israel by the sword, and caused its remnants to be scattered and scorned. He caused the Torah to be altered, and brought the majority of the world to err, and to serve a god other than the L-rd...." (Laws of Kings and Their Wars, Uncensored version, Mosad HaRav Kook edition, Ch11).

This is what we affirm several times a day in the concluding "*Aleynu*" prayer. The following verse is deleted in many prayer books used in the Diaspora, but here in Israel, we say it concerning the nations, "They bow down to vanity and emptiness, and pray to a god that cannot save."

The "*Aleynu*" prayer expresses our heartfelt wish that idol worship be uprooted from the earth, and that the world come to understand that G-d alone is the One and Only King, "We hope, therefore, L-rd our G-d, soon to behold Your majestic glory, when the abominations will be removed from the earth, and the false gods exterminated; when the world will be perfected under the reign of the Almighty, and all mankind will call upon Your Name, and the wicked of the earth will be turned to You. My all the inhabitants of the world realize and know that to You every knee must bend and every tongue vow allegiance...."

Amen.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Certainly *“The Kuzari”* is in the Top Ten of the most influential books on Judaism ever written. *“The Kuzari,”* by Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, is universally accepted and acclaimed as a classic of Torah scholarship.

Written in the form of a conversation between a Rabbi and a gentile king who is looking to find the true religion, *“The Kuzari”* lucidly explains the foundations upon which Judaism is based. What better time than “Book Week” to take another look at this wonderful classic? Below are excerpts from the book dealing with *Eretz Yisrael*. This should put an end to the intellectual ping pong of Diaspora diehards who like to play “It’s a commandment, but it isn’t a commandment. It’s a commandment, but it isn’t a commandment....” with the *mitzvah* of dwelling in *Eretz Yisrael*.

After studying *“The Kuzari”*, no one can say that it isn’t a *mitzvah* to make *aliyah* and live in *Eretz Yisrael*.

The King of Kuzar:

I understand what you mean about His People, but less so about His Land.

The Rabbi:

You will have no difficulty in perceiving that one country may have higher qualifications than others. There are places in which particular plants, metals, or animals are found, or where the inhabitants are distinguished by their form and character, since perfection or deficiency of a person are produced by a mingling of the elements.

The King of Kuzar:

Yet I never heard that inhabitants of the Land of Israel are better than other people.

The Rabbi:

How about the hill where you say that vines thrive so well? If it had not been properly planted and cultivated, it would never have produced grapes. Priority belongs firstly, as we have stated, to the People who are the essence and kernel of the nations [those who have been chosen by the L-rd to be the bearers of His Word]. Secondly, it belongs to the Land, on account of the special Divine acts that are connected with it, which I would compare to the cultivation of the vineyard. No other location would share the distinction of the Divine Influence, just as no other mountain may be able to produce good wine.

The King of Kuzar:

How could this be? In the time between Adam and Moses were there not prophetic visions in other places, those granted to Abraham in Ur Chasdeem, to Ezekiel and Daniel in Bablyon, and to Jeremiah in Egypt?

The Rabbi:

Whoever prophesized did so either in the Holy Land, or concerning it, like Abraham, in order to reach it. Ezekiel and Daniel prophesized on its account. Adam lived and died in the Land. Tradition tells us that in the Cave of the Patriarchs are buried four pairs: Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah. This is the Land which bears the name *“before the L-rd”* and of which it is stated, *“the eyes of the L-rd are always upon it”* (Devarim, 11:12). It was also the first object

of jealousy between Cain and Abel, when they desired to know which of them would be Adam's successor and heir to his holy essence and perfection in order to inherit the Land and to stand in connection with the Divine Influence, while the other would be overlooked. When Abel was killed by Cain, the Land was left without an heir. It is stated that *"Cain went out of the presence of the L-rd"* (Bereshit, 4:16) which means that he left the Land, saying, *"Behold, You have driven me out this day from the face of the earth, and from Your face I shall be hid"* (Bereshit, 5:14). In the same way it is said, *"But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the Presence of the L-rd"* (Jonah, 1:3), but he only fled from the place of prophecy (Israel). G-d, however, brought him back out of the belly of the whale and appointed him to be a prophet in the Land.

When Seth was born, he was like Adam and took Abel's place, giving him claim to the Land, which is the next step to the Garden of Eden. The Land was then the object of jealousy between Isaac and Ishmael, till the latter^[SP9] was rejected as worthless. Although he was blessed with worldly prosperity, the birthright was established with Isaac, as it says, *"My Covenant I will establish with Isaac"* (Bereshit, 5:21) which refers to his attachment to the Divine Influence and eternal life in the World to Come. Neither Ishmael nor Esau could boast of this Covenant, even though they were otherwise prosperous. Once again, jealousy arose between Jacob and Esau over the birthright and blessing, but Esau was rejected in favor of Jacob, in spite of his physical strength.

Prophecy was granted to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam in Egypt [to free the Jews to bring them to Israel] and Sinai and Paran are reckoned as a part of *Eretz Yisrael* because they are located on this side of the Red

Sea, as it says, *“And I will set your boundaries from the Red Sea, even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river”* (Shemot, 23:31).

The “binding” of Isaac took place on a desolate mountain [in the Land of Israel] Mount Moriah. Not until the days of King David, when it was inhabited, was the secret revealed that it was the place especially prepared for the *Shechinah* [Divine Presence] as it is said, *“And Abraham called the name of the place ‘The L-rd shall see’ as it is said to this day, in the mount of the L-rd it shall be seen”* (Bereshit, 22:14). In the Book of Chronicles it is stated more clearly that the Temple was built on Mount Moriah. These are, without doubt^[SP10], the places worthy of being called the Gates of Heaven.

Look how Jacob ascribed the vision that he saw, not to the purity of his soul, nor to his faith, not to his true integrity, but to the place, as it says, *“How awe-inspiring is this place”* (Bereshit, 28:17). Prior to this, it is said, *“And he lighted upon a specific place”* (Ibid, 11) that is to say, the chosen one.

Was not Abraham also, after having been greatly elevated, brought into contact with the Divine Influence, and made the chariot of this essence, removed from his birthplace to go forth to the place where his perfection could be complete? So, too, when an agriculture finds the root of a good tree in a desert region. He transplants it into properly tilled ground, to improve it and cause it to grow; to change it from a wild root to a cultivated one, from a tree that bore fruit by chance to one which produced a luxuriant crop. In the same way, the gift of prophecy was retained among Abraham’s descendants in Israel, their

property as long as they remained in the Land and fulfilled the required conditions of purity, worship, sacrifices, and above all, the reverence for the *Shechinah*. For the Divine Influence, one may say, singles out him who appears worthy of being connected with it, such as prophets and pious men, and their G-d^[SP11].

The King of Kuzar:

Continue your discourse on the special advantages of the Land of Israel.

The Rabbi:

It was appointed to guide the world, and apportioned to the tribes of Israel from the time of the confusion of the languages, as it says, *“When the Most High divided among the nations their inheritance”* (Devarim, 32:8). Abraham was not fit to gain the Divine Influence, and to enter into a Covenant with G-d until he came to the Land of Israel. The Land was even granted its own Sabbaths, as it is said, *“Sabbath of the Land”* (Vayikra, 25:6) and *“The Land shall keep a Sabbath unto the L-rd”* (Ibid, 2). It is forbidden to sell it on perpetuity, as it says, *“For Mine is the Land”* (Ibid, 23). Observe that the *“feasts of the L-rd”* and *“the Sabbaths of the Land”* belong to the *“Land of the L-rd.”*

Thus the *“Sabbaths of the L-rd”* and the *“Festivals of the L-rd”* depend on the Land which is the *“inheritance of the L-rd.”* It is also called *“His holy mountain,” “His footstool,” “the Gate of Heaven,”* and it says, *“For the Torah shall go forth from Zion”* (Micah, 4:2). Our forefathers endeavored to live in the Land while it was in the hands of pagans, they yearned for it, and had their bones carried there, as with Jacob and Joseph. Moses prayed to see it, and when this was denied him, he

considered it a profound misfortune. Thereupon it was shown to him from the summit of Pisgah, which was to him an act of grace.

Persians, Indians, Greeks, and peoples of other nations, begged to be allowed to bring sacrifices there and to pray in the Holy Temple – they spent their wealth at the place, though they followed laws not recognized by the Torah. They honor it to this day, although the *Shechinah* no longer appears there. All nations make pilgrimages to it, long for it, excepting we ourselves, because we have been punished and are in disgrace. All which the Sages speak about its great qualities would take too long to relate.

The King of Kuzar:

Let me hear a few of their observations.

The Rabbi:

One teaching is “All roads lead to the Land of Israel, but none from it” (Mishna, Ketubot, 13:11). Concerning a wife who refuses to go there with her husband, the court decries that she is divorced and she forfeits her marriage settlement (Ketubot 110). On the other hand, if the husband refuses to accompany his wife to *Eretz Yisrael*, he is forced to divorce her and also pay her marriage settlement amount. The Sages further state: “It is better to dwell in the Holy Land, even in a town mostly inhabited by heathens, than abroad in a town mostly populated by Jews; for he who dwells in the Holy Land is compared to him who has a G-d, while he who dwells in the Diaspora is compared to him who has no G-d. Thus said King David, *‘For they have driven me out this day from dwelling in the inheritance of the L-rd, saying, Go serve other*

gods,’ which means that he who dwells outside of the Land is like someone who serves strange gods” (Ibid).

Another saying is: “to be buried in the Land of Israel is as if buried beneath the altar (Ketubot 111). They praise him who abides in the Land more than him who is carried there dead (Ibid). They say concerning he who could have live there, but did not do so, and only ordered his body to be carried there after his death: “While you lived you made My inheritance an abomination, but in death ‘you come and contaminate My Land’” (Jerusalem Talmud, Ketubot, 12:3; Jeremiah, 2:1). It is told that Rav Hananyah said, when asked whether it was lawful for a person to go abroad in order to marry the widow of his brother, “His brother married a pagan woman – praised be G-d who caused him to die – now this one follows him” (Ketubot 111). The Sages also forbade selling estates or the remains of a house to a heathen, or leaving a house in ruins. Other sayings are:

Fines can only be imposed in the Land itself (Sanhedrin 31). No slave can be taken abroad against his will (Mishna Gitten, 4:6), and many other similar regulations. Furthermore, the very air of the Holy Land makes wise (Baba Batra 158). The Sages expressed their love for the Land as follows, saying, “He who walks four cubits in the Land is assured happiness in the World to Come (Ketubot 111; Pesachim 113). Rabbi Zera answered a heathen who criticized his foolhardiness in crossing a river without waiting to reach a ford in his eagerness to enter the Land, “How can the place which Moses and Aaron could not reach, be reached by me?” (Ketubot 112).

The King of Kuzar:

If this be so, you transgress the commandment laid down in your Torah by not endeavoring to go up (make *aliyah*) to that place, to make it your abode in life and in death, although you say, “*Have mercy on Zion, for it is the house of our life,*” and believe that the Divine Presence shall return there. And had it no other preference than that the *Shechinah* dwelt there five hundred years, this is sufficient reason for men’s souls to retire there and find purification there, as happens near the abodes of the pious and the prophets. Is it not “*the Gate of Heaven?*” All nations agree on this point. Christians believe that the souls are gathered there and then lifted to Heaven. Islam teaches that it is the place of ascent, and that prophets are caused to ascend from there to Heaven. Further, you believe it is the place of the gathering on the day of Resurrection. Everybody turns to it in prayer and visits it in pilgrimage. Thus, your bowing and kneeling in its direction is either mere appearance or thoughtless worship. Yet your forefathers chose it as their abode in preference to their birthplaces, and lived there as strangers, rather than as citizens of their own country. This they did even at a time when the Divine Presence was not yet visible, when the country was full of unchastity, impurity, and idolatry. Your fathers had no other desire than to remain in it. Neither did they leave it in times of dearth and famine except with G-d’s permission. Finally, they directed their bones to be buried there.

The Rabbi:

This is a severe reproach, O king of the Kuzars. It is the sin which kept the Divine promise with regard to the Second Temple “*Sing and rejoice O daughter of Zion*” (Zecharia, 2:10) from being fulfilled. Divine Providence was ready to restore everything as it had been at first, if

they had all willingly consented to return. But only a part was ready to do so, while the majority and the aristocracy remained in Babylon, preferring dependence and subjugation, and unwilling to leave their houses and their business affairs. The words, *"I have put off my coat"* (Shir HaShirim, 2-4) refer to the people's slothfulness in consenting to return to Israel. The verse, *"My beloved stretches forth his hand through the opening"* may be interpreted as the urgent call of Ezra, Nachemiah, and the Prophets, until a portion of the people grudgingly responded to their call. In accordance with their unwillingly disposition, they did not receive full measure. Divine Providence only gives a man as much as he is prepared to receive – if his receptive capacity be small, he obtains little, and he receives much if it be great. Were we prepared to meet the G-d of our Forefathers with a pure mind, we would have found the same salvation as our Fathers had in Egypt. If we say, *"Worship at His holy mountain – worship at His footstool, He who restores His glory to Zion"* (Tehillim, 99:9) and other words to this effect, this is but as the chattering of the mockingbird and the nightingale. We do not realize what we say by this sentence, nor by others, as you rightly observe, O prince of the Kuzars.

[The conversation between the Rabbi and the king of the Kuzars continues, covering all aspects of Judaism. At the end of the book, moved by his own teachings about the centrality of the Land of Israel to Torah and Am Yisrael, the Rabbi decides to make *aliyah* himself.]

The book concludes:

The Rabbi was then concerned to leave the land of Kuzar and betake himself to Jerusalem. The king was displeased to let him go and spoke to him as follows:

The King of Kuzar:

What can be found in the Land of Israel nowadays since the Divine Presence is absent from it, while, with a pure mind and desire, a person can approach G-d in any place? Why put yourself into danger on land and sea, and in encountering dangerous peoples?

The Rabbi:

The visible *Shechinah* has indeed disappeared, because it does not reveal itself except to a prophet, or to the chosen people in the chosen place. This is what we look forward to in the verse, *“Let our eyes behold when You return Your Shechinah to Zion.”* As regards the invisible and spiritual *Shechinah*, it is with every born Israelite of virtuous life, pure heart, and upright mind before the L-rd of Israel. The Land of Israel is especially distinguished by the L-rd of Israel, and no function can be perfect except there. Many of the laws of the Torah do not apply to those who live outside of the Land. The heart and soul are only perfectly pure and immaculate in the place which is known to be specifically selected by G-d. Thus the longing for it is awakened, for the sake of selfless motives, especially for him who wishes to live there, and to atone for past transgressions, as the Sages teach, “Exile atones for sins” (Makkot 2), especially if one leaves his country to go to the place of G-d’s choice. The danger such a person risks on land and sea does not come under the category of *“You shall not tempt the L-rd”* (Devarim, 6:16) since this verse refers to risks which one takes when

traveling with merchandise in hope of gain. He who incurs even greater danger on account of his ardent desire to obtain forgiveness is free from reproach if he has made an accounting of his past deeds and is satisfied to spend the rest of his life in seeking the favor of the L-rd. He braves danger, and if he escapes, he praises G-d gratefully. But should he perish through his past sins, he has won the Divine favor, and he may be confident that he has atoned for most of his sins by his death.

The King of Kuzar:

I thought that you love freedom, but I now see you finding new religious duties which you will be obliged to fulfill in the Land of Israel, which are not in force here.

The Rabbi:

I only seek freedom from the service of the numerous people whose favor I do not care for, and shall never obtain, though I worked for it all of my life. Even if I could obtain it, it would not profit me, the serving of men and courting their favor. I would rather seek the favor of the One whose favor is obtained with the smallest effort, yet it profits in this world and the next. This is the favor of G-d, it is His service which spells freedom, and humility before Him is true honor.

The King of Kuzar:

Since you believe in everything you profess, behold, G-d knows your mind, which is open before Him, who knows all that is hidden.

The Rabbi:

This is true only when action is impossible. But a man has free will in his yearnings and in his acting on them. A person deserves blame if he expects concrete reward without performing the actual deeds that lead to it. For this reason it is written, *"You shall blow an alarm with the trumpets, and you shall be remembered before the L-rd your G-d"* (Bamidbar, 10:9). G-d need not be reminded, but the actions in doing the *mitzvot* must be performed in their completeness to merit reward. This is similar to prayers which must be recited in wholeness and with the proper intentions to be considered worthy supplications, for only when both intentions and actions are complete, is reward granted. If the action is minus the intention, or the intention missing the action, the expectation for reward is lost. It is only when the deed is impossible to perform, then there is benefit when a person guards the desire firmly in his heart, while apologizing to G-d for not being able to perform the deed. This is the intent of our prayer, *"On account of our sins, we have been driven out of our Land"* (Festival Musaf).

Furthermore, the person who stirs the hearts of others to be aroused with a love for this holy place is worthy of reward, beyond any doubt. He brings closer the day for which we hope, as it says, *"You shall arise and have mercy on Zion, for the time to favor her, yea, the set time is come. For Your servants take pleasure in her stones and embrace her very dust"* (Tehillim, 102:14-15). This means that Jerusalem will only be rebuilt when the children of Israel yearn for it to such an extent that they embrace her stones and her dust.

The King of Kuzar:

If this be so, it would be a sin to hinder you. It is, on the contrary, a *mitzvah* to assist you. May G-d grant you His help, and may He be your shield and savior, and His kindness be upon you.

So ends "*The Kuzari*" with the Rabbi sailing off to *Eretz Yisrael*.

It's time to follow his example. See you here soon!

Judaism in the Twilight Zone

Remember the old TV show, the “Twilight Zone?” With Rod Serling? Fantastic, wasn’t it? If Rod had done a show on the Diaspora, here’s how he might have begun:

“This is Jeremy Cohen, one of the many Jews who live in America. He’s going to the *shul* this morning just like he does every day to put on *tefillin* and pray, thinking that his prayers are ascending to the G-d of Israel, but he doesn’t know that his prayers are giving strength to the angel of America. Jeremy Cohen doesn’t know this because he is lost in a foreign dimension, an unwitting captive in the Diaspora, otherwise known as the Twilight Zone.”

To explain this deep conception, we will once again have a look at the Commentary of the Ramban to the Torah portion of *Achre Mot*. The Ramban explains this unique holiness of the Land of Israel by revealing that when G-d created the world and distributed the different lands to different peoples, he placed Angels, or Celestial Ministers, over the gentile nations to rule over their affairs. The different characteristics of these angels result in the differing cultures and languages and customs of the peoples. The Ramban writes:

“Now outside the Land of Israel, though every place belongs to His glorious Name, its purity is not perfect because of the celestial servants that hold sway there, and the gentiles go astray after these celestial agents to worship them. This is the reason that *Hashem* is known as the ‘G-d of gods,’ referring to these lesser angelic powers.

Only one land had no Celestial Minister appointed over it – the Land of Israel, which G-d rules over alone. Therefore, moral transgression is much more severe in the Land of Israel than other lands, and the Holy Land vomits out sinners who pollute the Land through their deeds” (Ramban, Commentary on the Torah, Vayikra, 18:25).

It is G-d’s intention that His Chosen People live in His Chosen Land. That way, He rules over Israel alone without any intermediary angel. The Ramban states:

“This is the meaning of the saying of the Rabbis of the Talmud: ‘Whoever lives outside the Land of Israel is as if he has no G-d’ (Ketubot 110B), for it is said, *‘I am the Eternal, your G-d, Who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your G-d’* (Devarim, 25:38). When you are in the land of Canaan, I am your G-d. When you are not in the land of Canaan, I am not your G-d (Ramban, loc cited).

Now, of course, G-d is everywhere, but because he has appointed angels to rule over other lands, it is **as if** the Jews in the Diaspora have no G-d. All of their prayers and Torah learning go up to the angel who presides over that land, giving strength to that foreign nation. This is why wherever Jews lived in great numbers, the countries they lived in were superpowers. And this is why when the Jews left those countries, like Spain and Russia, their great empires collapsed.

This is what makes the Diaspora a “Twilight Zone.” The Jew thinks he is worshipping G-d and keeping the Torah as it is meant to be kept, but this isn’t the case at all. Thus, our Rabbis have taught that whoever lives in the Diaspora is like one who worships foreign gods (Ketubot 110B),

because of the angels that rule there. Furthermore, they said: “In all times a Jew should live in the Land of Israel, even in a city where the majority of inhabitants are pagans, and not live in the Diaspora, even in a city where the majority of inhabitants are Jews, for everyone who dwells in *Eretz Yisrael* is like someone who has a G-d, and everyone who dwells outside of the Land is like someone who has no G-d” (Ibid).

G-d created the Jewish People to be His unique treasure: “*You shall be my unique treasure from amongst all the peoples*” (Shemot, 19:5). “*You shall be My people, and I will be your G-d*” (Yermiyahu, 11:4). In other words, the Ramban explains, the Jewish People will not be under any lesser Celestial Ministers, so G-d gave them their own special Land, where He alone is sovereign without His heavenly assistants. “*I am the Eternal your G-d who has set you apart from the peoples*” (Yermiyahu, 22:20), meaning, in the words of the Ramban: “He has set us apart from the nations over which He has appointed heavenly princes and other celestial powers by giving us the Land of Israel so He, blessed be He, will be our G-d.”

This isn't something I made up. These are the holy words of our Sages and the Ramban, who was called the “Father of Israel” because of his greatness in Torah.

The Ramban goes on to explain why our Twilight Zone character, Jeremy Cohen, isn't really performing the *mitzvah* of *tefillin* as it is supposed to be performed when he laces the straps over his forearm before morning prayers. This is because the *mitzvot* are meant to be performed in the Land of Israel, and not in the Diaspora, where they are like a practice rehearsal until we return to Israel:

“Although I banish you from the Land of Israel to outside of the Land, make yourselves distinctive by continuing to keep the commandments, so that when you return they will not be novelties to you” (Ramban, there. Also, Sifre, Ekev, 43). Why? Because, the Ramban answers: **“The main fulfillment of the commandments is performing them when dwelling in the Land of Israel. Therefore our Sages have said that dwelling in the Land of Israel is equal in weight to all of the commandments of the Torah”** (Sifre, Reah, 80).

Whether you call the Diaspora the “Twilight Zone” or the “Matrix,” the idea is the same. You might think that it’s the real thing, but it isn’t. You might think it’s the best place to be, but it isn’t. You might think you are leading a full Jewish life, but you’re not. As the “Twilight Zone” theme song sounds, “Dee dee, dee dee, dee dee, dee dee, dee dee....”

Joseph Cohen may be content putting on his *tefillin*, but he’s a prisoner of the Twilight Zone. What about you?

Stop the Masquerade!

The decree of destruction fell upon the Jews of Shushan because they wanted to stay loyal Persian citizens instead of returning to the Holy Land to rebuild Jewish life in Israel. They wanted to rub shoulders with the *goyim*, attend the gala parties of Achashverus, enjoy their goblets of kosher Manischewitz wine, while feasting their eyes on the king's harem of half-naked women.

Previous to the miracle of *Purim*, in the year 3391, the Persian king, Cyrus, ordered the reconstruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Led by the prophet, Ezra, a small number of Jews returned to Israel to begin the rebuilding. The vast majority, including the aristocracy, were unwilling to give up their businesses and positions of honor in the Persian community. This was highlighted by their participation in the great feast of Achashverus, who rose to the throne in the 3392, and immediately halted the reconstruction of the Temple. Against Mordechai's warnings, the Jews of Shushan flocked to take part in the celebration that was to be a bawdy, immoral, wife-swapping burlesque ("Me'am Lo'ez," Esther, Ch. 1 and 2). Even when Achashverus brought out the sacred Temple vessels, the Jews of Shushan didn't leave the party.

The Divine wrath and the decree of Haman were soon to follow.

Unlike on *Hanukah*, we don't say the joyous recitation of *Hallel* on *Purim* because even after the great salvation, we were still subject to foreign rule in a foreign land – as King David teaches us, "*How can I sing the L-rd's song in a foreign land?*" (Tehillim 137)

A Jew cannot really be happy in a foreign land. He can find material comfort, physical pleasures, and egotistical highs, but he can't find true joy of the soul. True joy for a Jew can only be found in the Land of Israel.

That's why the Psalm continues: *"How can I sing the L-rd's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem!"*

The Jews in the time of Mordechai wanted to forget Jerusalem and stay right where they were in the flesh pot of Shushan.

We can dress up in foreign costumes and try to pretend that we are loyal Persians, or Germans, or Americans, but the Hamans and Hitlers of the world will always eventually come to power and put an end to the masquerade by reminding us that we are Jews, strangers in a strange land, who simply don't belong.

And if Hamans don't do the job, the lavish parties, loose women, and prestigious career opportunities devour us all the same in the ovens of assimilation.

Dear friends in the Diaspora, why continue the masquerade? Why continue pretending to be Americans and Canadians and Englishman and Australians?

Come home to Israel and discover the joy of being yourself!

The Land of Milk and Honey.

We mentioned that to rectify the sin of the Spies, who despised the cherished Land, we have to love the Land of Israel more than anywhere else. So, here's another tribute to the Land of Milk and Honey.

Like the Spies, Korach and his followers wanted to remain in the wilderness, protected by the miraculous Clouds of Glory, where they could learn Torah in all-year-round air-conditioned comfort, without having to meet the physical challenges and dangers of conquering and settling the Land of Israel. Like the Spies, Korach and his crowd were top Torah scholars, but they knew that a new, more versatile, type of leader would be needed upon entry into the Land, so they rebelled against Moshe, figuring that if they ousted him, they could continue their comfortable sojourn in the wilderness, with their comfortable office jobs.

Moshe wanted to give them a second chance to repent before their fate was sealed, so he called them to the *Mishkan* for a meeting. As it says:

“And Moshe sent to call Datan and Aviram, the sons of Eliav, but they said, ‘We will not go up (*lo n’aleh*); is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, and you will make yourself a prince over us?....*Lo n’aleh!*” (Bamidbar, 16:12-14)

“*Lo n’aleh!*” they told him. They weren’t just saying that they wouldn’t go up to the Tabernacle to meet with Moshe – they were saying, “*Lo n’aleh*,” meaning, “We won’t make *aliyah*!” Not only that. They called Egypt the land flowing with milk and honey! In their craving to stay in

the safety of the Clouds of Glory and hold on to their positions of leadership, they turned Egypt into the Promised Land!

Because they rejected the Land, the land swallowed them up. Measure for measure. Korach and his followers were swallowed up physically, but a person can also be swallowed up culturally and morally, too, by the influences of the foreign culture around him, and by harboring personal cravings foreign to the Torah.

A friend of mine who recently returned from a short trip to New York on a family matter told me that one day, while walking along a New York City sidewalk, he heard a small voice coming from below the street. When he went over and put his ear to the manhole covering, he heard voices calling out from the depths, “Fishman told the truth! Fishman told the truth!”

What a shame they didn’t listen.

Back to the Beginning

We are back to the Torah portion *“Lech Lecha,”* and once again I am totally baffled and stumped. We read the Torah over and over again, year after year, to internalize its messages. At least, that’s what’s supposed to happen.

Now what’s the very first thing G-d said to Avraham, the father of the Jews?

“Get thee forth to the Land of Israel!”

G-d doesn’t even bother to say, “Hello, I’m G-d. Nice to meet you.”

He doesn’t tell him to observe *Shabbat*, or keep kosher, or put on *tefillin*. He doesn’t tell him to eat gefilte fish, or bagels and lox. He doesn’t even tell him to be a doctor or a lawyer. Right off the bat, G-d tells him to go to Israel!

Obviously, we are supposed to learn from this that G-d wants the Jews to live in Israel. Avraham is the father of the Jewish People. What’s true for the father is true for the son. Not only that. G-d could easily have arranged things so that Avraham was born in the Land of Israel and not in Ur Kasdim. After all, Adam and Eve were here, and Cain and Abel fought over who would inherit the Land, and Noah came here after he got off the boat. Avraham could easily have been born here to avoid the long camel ride. But G-d chose to set him first in the Diaspora to teach us that wherever a Jew might be born, G-d wants him to immigrate to Israel, just like with Avraham.

At least this is clear to me. I don’t see any other way you can read it. But, then I thought that maybe my great love for Israel makes me prejudice, so to test things out, I asked my teenage daughter:

“Why do you think the very first thing that G-d said to Avraham was to go to the Land of Israel?” I asked her.

“So all Jews will know that G-d wants us to live in Israel,” she answered. Maybe, I thought, she heard me say that to guests from America during some *Shabbat* meal. So, I decided to ask my ten-year-old boy.

“Why do you think the very first thing that G-d said to Avraham was to go to the Land of Israel?” I asked him.

“So all Jews will know that G-d wants us to live in Israel,” he answered without even pausing to think.

“Hmmm,” I thought. Maybe he also heard me tell it to some guest. So I went next door to the neighbor and asked their eight-year-old kid.

“Why do you think the very first thing that G-d said to Avraham was to go to the Land of Israel?” I asked him.

“So all Jews will know that G-d wants us to live in Israel,” he answered just as fast as my son had.

Just to be sure, I hung out on the street to ask some random passerby. We live near the Institute for the Blind, and pretty soon a blind person came by, feeling his way with a cane.

“Excuse me,” I said. “Why do you think the very first thing that G-d said to Avraham was to go to the Land of Israel?” I asked him.

“So all Jews will know that G-d wants us to live in Israel,” he answered without batting an eye.

Maybe it’s only Israelis who think that way, I thought. So to make the test as fair and scientific as I could, I walked over to the nearby Renaissance Hotel to ask a tourist. The first person I met was a tall

African man dressed in a colorful tribal garment who had come to Israel as part of "Pastor Wayne's Kenyan Jerusalem Mission."

"Excuse me," I said. "Do you speak English?"

"Quite well," he answered with a friendly smile that lit up his face.

"Why do you think the very first thing that G-d said to Avraham in the Bible was to go to the Land of Israel?" I asked him.

"To teach the Jewish People that G-d wants them to live in the Promised Land," he replied in a deep, resonant voice that echoed through the lobby.

Well, that pretty much proved that the reason was obvious not only to me, and that I haven't been exaggerating or making things up in my blogs.

Seeing another guest wearing a baseball cap and speaking very basic Hebrew in a distinctly American accent, I decided to ask him as well.

"Excuse me," I said. "Why do you think the very first thing that G-d said to Avraham was to go to the Land of Israel?" I asked.

"Beats me," he answered with a blank look on his face. Then turning away, he called to his wife, "Sheila! Go back to the room and bring the suntan cream. The sun here is murder!"

Despondent, I walked over to the bar and ordered a beer. I just couldn't make any sense of it. I mean, children understand it. A blind person understands it. Gentiles understand it.

"What's the matter?" the bartender asked. "You look like your wife kicked you out of the house."

He was an Arab.

“Let me ask you something,” I said. “Why do you think the very first thing that G-d said to Avraham was to go to the Land of Israel?”

“To teach the Jews that he wants them to live in Israel,” he answered.

Even he knew the answer!

Was I ever crestfallen. I still am. I’m sorry. I don’t know what to tell you. I just can’t figure it out.

Arise From the Dust!

Among the reasons some people cite for not coming on *aliyah* is the halachic response of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, of blessed memory, one of the most foremost Torah authorities of the last generation. Rabbi Feinstein, who lived in New York, was asked if *aliyah* to *Eretz Yisrael* was an obligatory *mitzvah* of the Torah, as stated by the Ramban, or a *mitzvah* that isn't obligatory in our times, as a *Tosefot* in the name of R. Haim HaCohen implies (Ketubot 110, considered to have been recorded by a mistaken student). Rabbi Feinstein answered that indeed it is a *mitzvah* from the Torah, as the Ramban wrote, and about which most Torah authorities, both *Rishonim* and *Achronim*, agreed (See the Pitchei Tshuva to the Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer, Section 75:6), but that it was, in his opinion, a voluntary *mitzvah* which wasn't obligatory (Igrot Moshe, Even HaEzer, 102). He compared it to the Torah commandment of *tzitzit*, which requires putting *tzitzit* on a garment that you wear if it has four corners. But if you don't choose to wear such a garment, you don't have to perform the commandment of *tzitzit*.

A wonderful translation by Rabbi Moshe Lichtman of Rabbi Tzvi Glatt's book "Rise From the Dust" ("*M'Afar Kumi*,") has just been published. The book is an in-depth study of the *mitzvah* of *aliyah* and settling the Land of Israel. The main topic analyzed is this very question, whether the *mitzvah* of *aliyah* is obligatory in our times. Rabbi Glatt, may *Hashem* revenge his blood, was murdered by an Arab terrorist in Hevron. He clearly demonstrates that *aliyah* is a Torah *mitzvah* obligatory in our times, as the Ramban and a long list of eminent Halachic authorities confirm.

Included in the book, “Rise From the Dust” is a response written by Israel’s former Chief Rabbi, the revered Rabbi Avraham Shapira, of blessed memory, Head of the High Rabbinical Court, and Rosh Yeshiva of the Mercaz HaRav Yeshiva in Jerusalem. He strongly disagrees with Rabbi Feinstein, questioning the whole idea of a “voluntary” *mitzvah*. Here are some excerpts of his halachic essay which appears in translation in “Rise From the Dust.”

Rabbi Shapira writes:

“The implication of this new concept – a ‘voluntary *mitzvah*’ – is that one is not obligated to fulfill it, but if one does, he has performed a *mitzvah*. This seems self-contradictory. On a simple level, a Torah commandment, counted as one of the 613, is not dependent on man’s desire – if he wants to fulfill it, he will, and if not, he won’t. After all, this contradicts the whole idea of a *mitzvah*, which is a command from *Hashem Yitbarach*. How can one say that G-d leaves the fulfillment of His decree to man’s discretion? We assume that G-d did not give us the *mitzvot* in order to derive pleasure from them. Rashi explains in Tractate *Rosh HaShanah* (28a), ‘Rather, they are a yoke upon man’s neck, to fulfill *Hashem*’s desire.’ What kind of a yoke is it if one can decide whether to fulfill them or ignore them?

“This (the *mitzvah* of *aliyah*) is different from [Rabbi Moshe Feinstein’s example of] *tzitzit*, which is not an obligatory *mitzvah*, but one that depends on man’s will. *Tzitzit* depends on a person’s desire to wear a four-cornered garment, and the Torah does not obligate one to wear such a garment. However, once a person wears a four-cornered

garment, he is obligated to place *tzitzit* on its corners, and that is not dependent on his desire at all. Once he wears a garment that the Torah speaks of, he cannot evade the *mitzvah*. Why, then, would we say that there is a *mitzvah* to make *aliyah*, but that it is up to man whether he wants to fulfill it or not? It appears that we do not find another *mitzvah* like this in the count of the 613....

“All this proves that none of the *mitzvot*, especially those included in the 613, depend on man’s desire. Rather, we force him to do them. Only those that Scriptures designate as being voluntary depend on a person’s willingness [to perform them], for the verses teach us that these *mitzvot* are essentially not part of the 613. Rather, they are good practices, fitting to do, and good advice. All this is obvious, for it is illogical to say that the Torah establishes a *mitzvah* and man is permitted to say, ‘I am not interested....’

“Nevertheless, it is clear that when there is an explicit *mitzvah* in the Torah – one of the positive commandments included in the 613 – one cannot say that it depends on whether or not a person wants to [fulfill it]. Therefore, according to the Ramban, who holds that dwelling in *Eretz Yisrael* is a positive commandment counted as one of the 613, one cannot say that fulfilling it depends on man’s desire. Rather, it is absolutely obligatory.

“The Meiri writes in *Bava Kama* (80), ‘Every Jew is commanded to establish his dwelling in *Eretz Yisrael*.’ In addition, the Ramban writes in *Bava Batra* (24) that the law of [designating open areas for the purpose of] beautifying a city applies only in *Eretz Yisrael*. Regarding *Chutz*

LaAretz, however, he says, ‘If only [those lands] would be despicable in the eyes of [the Jews] who dwell there!’

“Why, then, did the *gedolim* (Torah giants) of previous generations neglect this *mitzvah*? *Teshuvot Maharam* and *Terumat HaDeshen* explain that [those generations] were under duress and unable to dwell in *Eretz Yisrael* because of difficult conditions, etc... I would add that this is not a regular case of compulsion, in the sense of ‘The All-merciful exempts one who is forced [to sin].’ Rather, the *mitzvah* itself is suspended when dwelling in the Land entails hardship. Similarly, we find that one who experiences discomfort sitting in a *sukkah* is exempt from the *mitzvah*, because of [the rule] “You shall sit [in the *sukkah*] as you dwell [in your home].” *Chazal* determined that the definition of “dwelling” is when one is comfortable and has space, not when one is in pain. Dwelling somewhere in pain is not considered dwelling. The same applies to going up to live in *Eretz Yisrael*. One who finds his [new] accommodations distressful, relative to what he had in *Chutz LaAretz*, does not [fulfill] the *mitzvah* of *You shall dwell therein* (*BeMidbar* 33:53). Thus, any situation in which one would be exempt from sitting in a *sukkah*, one would also be exempt from dwelling in *Eretz Yisrael*....

“Now, if the definition of ‘discomfort’ [with respect to *aliyah*] is identical to its definition with respect to *sukkah*, [we can deduce the following]. Obviously, dwelling in a *sukkah*, a temporary structure, is less comfortable than dwelling in a permanent home. Nonetheless, that certainly does not constitute ‘pain.’ One is exempt from the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* only when dwelling there is painful, relative to the type of dwelling it is, and this requires serious evaluation. [So too, one is not

exempt from dwelling in *Eretz Yisrael* just because it is easier to live in *Chutz LaAretz*.] The great Torah scholars of [previous] generations determined that it would be [genuinely] painful for them to dwell in the Land, and they were [therefore] exempt from doing so. Today, however, when the Land of Israel is [governed by] the State of Israel, and enjoys [progressive] economic conditions, the level of ‘discomfort’ is very mild – especially for singles who are free from the yoke of family – **everyone is undoubtedly assumed to be obligated in the *mitzvah*.** One would require the judgment of great Torah scholars to determine that he is exempt from performing the *mitzvah*. In any event, it is clear that the concept of a *mitzvah* being dependent on each person’s discretion – if he wants to do it, he will accept it; but if not, he will reject it – is incomprehensible.”

In other words, the obligation of coming to live in Israel is in full force today, especially with the booming economy and luxury apartments and villas that can be found everywhere around the country. Yes, sometimes you have to wait behind a long line of shopping carts piled high with food at the supermarket, and you may get shoved by a Haredi Jew on a packed bus on the way to the Kotel, and Ben and Jerry’s ice cream can melt pretty fast in the Mediterranean sun, but the hardship and pain of the early pioneer days are over. If you ask me, living in Israel is far less distressing and painful than living as a hated minority in someone else’s land. So, come! Don’t waste any more time! It’s the biggest *mitzvah* there is!

Two Paths Diverged

I vaguely recall a Robert Frost poem that we learned in elementary school, whose title was something like, "Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening." With *Shabbat* just two hours away, I don't have time to look it up. The end was something like, "Two paths diverged in a snowy wood. I took the one less traveled by, and that made all the difference."

That could be the motto of our forefather, Avraham. He could have stayed in his father's lucrative idol business and lived a comfortable life in Ur Kasdim, but he chose the path less traveled by and that made all the difference, bringing about the foundation of *Am Yisrael* in *Eretz Yisrael*.

Avraham could have pretended that the idols in his father's store were real gods, but instead he smashed them to pieces, and that made all the difference, bringing the knowledge of one G-d into the world.

Avraham could have turned his back on Lot when his life was endangered, but he risked his own life to save him, and that made all the difference, teaching the Jewish People that we are responsible to come to the aid of our brethren, even when they aren't *Tzaddikim* like Lot.

Avraham could have refused to sacrifice his son, Yitzhak, but he immediately agreed to obey G-d's command, and that made all the difference, giving strength to all of his offspring, in all of their generations, to sacrifice their lives for *Hashem*, for the Land of Israel, and for the Torah.

Avraham didn't choose the "good life" for himself, and that made all the difference.

Major League Judaism

Just as the new Israeli baseball league is a poor imitation of Major League baseball, the Judaism of the Diaspora is second string compared with the Judaism of Eretz *Yisrael*.

For example, this coming year in Israel, every religious Jew will be busy, in one form or another, with the *mitzvah* of *Shmittah*, the Sabbatical year when the Land must rest from labor. This countrywide *mitzvah* will influence the food that we buy, where we will buy it, from whom the purchases will be made, what housewives will do with the discarded peels of the Land's holy fruit, what homeowners do in their gardens, and what farmers do in their agricultural fields. All of these things don't exist for the Jews of *Chutz L'Aretz* (the Diaspora) who are not obligated by this gigantic, national *mitzvah*. Even those in Israel who hold by the "*Heter HaMichirah*" which technically temporarily transfers the Land to non-Jewish ownership, are involved in a day-to-day basis with the consequences of *Shmittah*.

The Torah portion, "*Ke Tavo*," that we read yesterday on *Shabbat*, begins, "*When you come to the Land....*" The Torah doesn't say, "*If you come to the Land....*" The Torah takes it for granted that a Jew will come to the Land because that is where a Jew belongs, that is where G-d decreed that the Jews keep the Torah.

The Torah portion goes on to describe all of the bountiful blessings the Jewish People will receive if we properly express the gratitude and joy we should rightly feel over the great gift of the Land. In contrast, if we

scorn this unparalleled gift of *Eretz Yisrael*, terrible curses will come to pass (may it be on our enemies), curses that have indeed plagued our history as a people because we “*did not serve the L-rd your G-d with joyfulness and with gladness of heart for the abundance of all things*” (Devarim, 28:47).

In a letter, Rabbi Kook writes:

“The source of the moral baseness which continues to darken the world stems from the lack of recognition regarding the value and wisdom of the Land of Israel. Thus the sin of the Spies, who spoke derogatorily about the pleasant Land, remains uncorrected. To rectify this, the Land’s praise, splendor, holiness, and honor must be declared to all the world” (Letters, Vol.1, 112-113).

Our Sages have long ago noted the exalted level of *Eretz Yisrael* in saying, “There is no Torah like the Torah of *Eretz Yisrael*” (Bereshit Rabbah,16:7). This is so, not only because over two-thirds of the Mishna deals specifically with Jewish life in *Eretz Yisrael*, and because many *mitzvot* can only be performed here - the Judaism of the Land of Israel is immeasurably more elevated because the Jewish people possess true national vitality only in the Land of Israel. Outside of the Land, Jews can excel as individuals in all fields of endeavor, including great Torah scholars, but the light of G-d cannot appear in its intended NATIONAL format. Only in the Land of Israel can the Jews be a “KINGDOM of priests and a holy NATION” (Shemot, 19:6). The *Zohar* emphasizes that the Jews can be a Nation only in Israel, and not outside of it, where we are minorities in other people’s lands. (Zohar, Vayikra,

93B). Prophecies of Redemption all involve the return of the Jewish People to the Land of Israel and the restoration of Jewish sovereignty over the Land. The Jewish People's unique prophetic talent is dependent on being in the Land of Israel (Kuzari, 1:95; 2:8-24). The Temple can only be rebuilt on the Temple Mount, and the full revelation of G-d's Presence is exclusive to *Eretz Yisrael*, as the prophet teaches, "*For Torah will go forth from Zion, and the word of the L-rd from Jerusalem*" (Isaiah, 2:3).

At the time of the Second Temple, when we failed to uphold the high moral standard demanded of us by the Torah, we were punished and exiled from the Land. G-d's worldly vessel was shattered. Israel was conquered, Jerusalem was razed, the Land was laid waste. G-d's Chosen People were scattered and debased. Like the Jews, G-d's Presence went into exile (Megillah, 29A). His light in the world became hidden. In effect, mankind was cut off from G-d. This gave rise to many false religions like Christianity and Islam. To rectify this tragedy and return the world to G-d, the Jewish people must return to their previous spiritual stature, including a national life in Israel, the only place in the world where the Torah can be observed in all of its wholeness because of the many commandments unique to the Land (Ramban, Vayikra, 18:25).

On an even deeper level, each Jew has a bit of the *Shechinah*, or the Presence of G-d, within him. When a Jew returns to the Land of Israel, he is, in effect, bringing the *Shechinah back* with him (Rashi, Devarim, 30:3). This is the Kabbalistic concept of "raising up the buried sparks of holiness from the husks." Since the soul of a Jew is infused with the

light of the *Shechinah*, when the Jewish people return en masse to Israel, the light of G-d in the world returns with them.

A visual illustration will help us envision this global spiritual revolution that is gradually unfolding in our time. To raise ourselves to an all-encompassing, history-spanning perspective, imagine being in a spaceship orbiting the earth. Down below, scattered all over the globe, are tiny, little lights. These lights are the Jews, in their lands of dispersion around the world. Slowly, lights begin to travel to a certain point on the globe — the Land of Israel. More and more lights begin to congregate there. From all over the world, the scattered lights begin to unite in Israel. Lights that do not make the journey begin to flicker and disappear. Gradually, a great beacon of light is formed in Israel, sending out rays of light to the four corners of the globe. These rays are the lights of *t'shuva*, summoning mankind back to G-d, calling for them to return.

Already, the eyes of the world are turned to Israel. Headlines about the tiny country of Israel fill news reports on a day-to-day basis from all over the world. In just a few decades, Israel has become a world leader in science, medicine, agriculture, computer technology, and a gamut of other fields. Israel has become by far the world center of Torah and boasts the greatest concentration of Torah giants and students.

When it comes to Judaism and keeping the Torah, Israel is the Big Leagues, my friends.

Medinat Yahoo

Good thing there wasn't Internet in the days of our forefather Avraham. If there had been, he may never have come to Israel. He may have decided to stay in Ur Kasdim, and settle with being a vicarious Israeli via the Internet. That way he could enjoy the best of both worlds, rubbing shoulders with all of the wealthy and high-ranking idol worshippers in Ur Kasdim, while at the same time sending in talkbacks critical of the way things were being run in the Holy Land.

After all, in Avraham's time, there were savage Canaanites living in *Eretz Yisrael*, but he came. And there weren't any kosher supermarkets back then, nor religious neighborhoods, nor Jewish Day Schools and *yeshivot* for the kids. In fact, there weren't any Jews living there at all. Avraham would be the first. Who needed the hassle? It made a lot more sense to stay where he was, where everyone knew him, enjoying the good life with the idol worshippers, and pretending, via the Internet, that he was actually involved in building the Jewish State.

Lucky for us that INN Talkbacks didn't exist back then. It might have been the one test that even Avraham couldn't have overcome.

Thank G-d I'm Not in America

In America, and the rest of the Western world, the high point of New Year's Day is getting drunk and going to bed with whatever woman you can.

In Israel, on *Rosh Hashanah*, the Jews spend two holy days praying in synagogue and marital relations are forbidden.

That pretty much sums up the difference between a gentile and a Jew, and the difference between living in the Diaspora and the Holy Land.

True, there are knuckleheads in Israel who will try to ape the *goyim* by partying tonight in bars and discos, and there are always Israel radio-show hosts who get all excited babbling about all sorts of secular nonsense, but, all in all, it's nothing like the drunken orgies you find throughout the Christian world on their New Year's Days.

The gentiles number the years from the birth of JC, the scourge of the Jews. Ironically, they are celebrating his brit. Count for yourselves. From December 25 to January 1 there are eight days. 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 1.

The Jews number the years from G-d's creation of the world. While the Western world's celebration of New Year's Day is founded on idol worship, the Jews acclaim the kingship and oneness of G-d.

On *Rosh Hashanah*, in the prayers called "*Zichronot*," the Jews remember that G-d is King over the earth. In contrast, on New Year's Eve, the gentiles try to forget G-d completely, so that He won't interfere in their drunken orgies, as they traditionally sing, "May old

acquaintances be forgotten,” including the woman you met that night, who’s lying passed out in a drunken stupor as you hurry out the door.

Thank G-d, I am not in America.

No More Excuses!

This *Shabbat*, we begin rereading the Book of *Devarim*, or Deutoronomy, as it is called in the Diaspora, to give it a non-Jewish sounding name. With the newly born Nation gathered before him, the Rabbi of all Rabbis, Moshe *Rabainu*, begins to explain the true meaning of the Torah, as it says:

“Moshe began to explain this Torah....” (Devarim, 1:6).

And what does he tell them?

“You have dwelt long enough in this mountain – turn and take up your journey....” (Ibid).

The Jewish Nation is not supposed to live in the Diaspora. G-d wants the Jews to live in the Land of Israel, as Moshe proclaims:

“Behold I have set the Land before you; go in and possess the Land which the L-rd swore to your fathers, to Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaacov, to give to them and to their offspring after them” (Devarim, 1:8).

This is spoken to them in the language of a command. Living in the Land of Israel is a commandment of the Torah, in all generations, as the Ramban makes clear (Ramban on the Torah, BaMidbar, 33:53; and Ramban, Supplement to the Sefer HaMitzvot of the Rambam, Positive Commandment #4). Furthermore, the authorities of *halachah*, the *Rishonim* (early authorities) and *Achronim* (later authorities), agree with him (See “Pitchei Tshuva,” Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer, Section 75, sub-section 6).

In the verse, *“Moshe began to explain this Torah....”* The Hebrew word for *“explain”* is באר. Rashi clarifies the meaning of the word by saying that Moshe explained the Torah in 70 languages (See Rashi, loc. cited).

Moshe explained the Torah in 70 languages because he knew that in the future, the Jews would be scattered to the four corners of the world amongst the 70 nations, where they would speak English, and French, and Spanish, and German, and Russian, and Arabic, and Portuguese, Yiddish, Brooklynese, and all of the rest. He wanted each and everyone to know, in the languages that they spoke, that *“You have dwelt long enough in the Diaspora – take up your journey - go in and possess the Land which the L-rd swore to your fathers, to Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaacov, to give to them and to their offspring after them.”*

That way they wouldn't have any excuses, claiming, *“I didn't know, I didn't understand, no one ever told me.”*

Pick any language you like. The Torah says the same thing in all of them. A Jew is supposed to live in the Land of Israel. *Comprendo?*

Package Deal

I will try to be as polite as I can and sensitive to the feelings of my beloved brothers and sisters in the Diaspora. I don't mean to strike out at anyone, nor burst anyone's bubble. But look what we have here this *Shabbat*! A Torah portion that pertains unequivocally, completely, 100%, exclusively to the Land of Israel! That's right, ladies and gentlemen, if you didn't believe me before, this week's Torah portion, "*Behar*," proves that the Torah was given to be performed in the Land of Israel alone!

Take a look for yourselves! The whole Torah portion details the laws of *Shmittah* and *Yovel*, which cannot be performed anywhere else! That's right! Only in the Land of Israel! Not in Brooklyn and not in France. Only in the Land of Israel! It's one and only Land that has its own Sabbath!

For those of you who may not be familiar with the Hebrew expression, "*Shmittah*," it means the Sabbatical Year, and "*Yovel*" means the Juuuuuuubilee.

Let's take a look at a few things in the *parsha*. G-d says to the Jewish People:

"You shall perform My decrees, and observe my ordinances, and perform them, and you shall dwell securely on the Land" (Vayikra, 25:18).

In other words, we are to perform the Torah's commandments and do them in the Land. The Torah and the Land and the Jewish People go together. It's what is called a package deal. If something is missing, it's not the real thing.

Even the most diehard defenders of *galut* have to face it. There is no such thing as *Shmittah* or *Yovel* in the Diaspora. Zero. *Effes*. They don't exist. So if a Jew wants to keep the Torah, and not just snips and snatches of it, he or she has to be in Israel.

And if you argue that we also don't keep *Shmittah* and *Yovel* in Israel these days according to its observance in the Torah, it's because the Jews of Diaspora haven't returned to live here, since that's a basic ingredient in keeping all its laws.

Isn't that clear? Can someone possibly not understand this? That is what is written in the Torah itself for everyone to see. It isn't a secret. I didn't make it up - so don't get angry at me.

Here's something else. Look at this Rashi. He wasn't known as a Kabbalist, so don't try to dismiss it as some mystical magic. The Torah portion states:

"I am Hashem your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan to be your G-d" (Vayikra, 25:38).

Rashi explains the meaning of *"to be your G-d"* by writing:

"For whoever resides in the Land of Israel, I am a G-d to him; and whoever leaves it is like one who worships idols" (Rashi, there).

Boooooos! Boooooos! Boooooos to Rashi!

How can he say something like this? Well, for one thing, it is also written verbatim in the Talmud (Ketubot 110B). Also because he understands that the Torah was given to be performed in Israel. Since scores of the commandments can only be performed there, like

Shmittah and *Yovel*, you would think that it's obvious. But Rashi, far far away in France, feels a need to nail the point home, so that the Jews of Paris won't forget.

Several blogs back, we gave the Ramban's explanation of this, regarding the angels who preside over the lands of the gentiles, but even without this esoteric understanding, we can grasp the fact that whoever leaves the Land of Israel is like someone who turns his back on the Torah, because he won't be able to perform many of the mitzvot which only can be performed in G-d's chosen Land. Rashi makes it clear.

And for those of you who want to squawk, "Rashi himself lived in France and didn't move to Israel," Rashi lived a thousand years ago when *aliyah* was extremely difficult. If there had been El Al Airlines back then, you can be sure he would have come, even if he could only afford a seat in second class!

Shabbat Shalom!

Planning a Summer Vacation?

Planning a summer vacation? Let's say you have enough money to go to Israel, but for the same price you can get an extra few days in Honolulu or Paris. Where should you choose?

Of course, if you are a Jew living in Israel, you don't have this question at all. It is forbidden to leave the Land of Israel simply to go on a pleasure jaunt overseas (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 531:4). This is because the Land of Israel is holy, and the rest of the world is not. Leaving Israel adversely affects a Jew's holiness and blemishes his worship of G-d. This is what King David meant when he said, *"For they have driven me out this day from being joined to the inheritance of the L-rd, saying, Go and serve other gods"* (Shmuel 1, 26:19). Certainly, King David wouldn't engage in idol worship, but as the Talmud explains, "Any Jew who lives outside the Land of Israel is like someone who has no G-d" (Ketubot 110b). A Jew is only allowed to leave the Land of Israel to do a *mitzvah*. He can go to the Diaspora to visit family, find a wife, or go on a business trip to make a livelihood, but to remain there is forbidden. Once he has accomplished his *mitzvah*, he must return to Israel. But if his trip is just for a fun vacation, then the Diaspora is out.

But what about the strange breed of Jew that lives outside of the Land to begin with, like a fish out of water? Let's say that due to the Roman conquest of ancient Israel, and the subsequent expulsion of the Jews, he was born in America. If he goes on a vacation to Paris or Hong Kong, he isn't affecting his level of holiness, because his surroundings are impure to begin with wherever he is. According to Jewish Law, the Diaspora possesses the spiritual status of a grave. Some graves are

known for their hot dogs, while others have the aromas of expensive perfumes. Some graves are surrounded by beautiful beaches, while others have buildings that reach up to the sky. But a grave is a grave whether it is New York, France, or the Virgin Islands. Whether a Jew visits Broadway or the Champs Elysses, it doesn't make a difference. A land filled with idol worship is spiritually polluting whether the idol is worshipped in English or French. Sure, the Jew may have a grand time at the museums and theaters. And if he is religious and takes off his yarmulke for a few days, well, what's the big sin in that? He can always wear a cap to hide the fact that he's Jewish.

However, if a Jew from America decides to vacation in Israel, then he is doing a *mitzvah*. Every four steps that he takes, he earns a place in the World to Come. In contrast, a Jew can walk all across the outback of Australia, and all he will get is sore feet. Plus, by spending his vacation money in Israel, the American Jew is helping the Jewish People resettle the Land. In boosting the economy of Israel by paying for hotel rooms and renting cars, he is playing an active part in Redemption. The Israel Tourist Ministry reports that for every 100,000 tourists coming to visit Israel, the country gains 9 million dollars and 4,500 permanent places of employment. One of the questions a Jew is asked by the Celestial Court when he gets to Heaven is "Did you look forward to the Redemption?" By having spent a vacation in Israel, he can answer, yes, he took a part in the rebuilding of the Jewish People in their Land. Chances are that he will also pray in a few *minyans* in Israel, go to the *Kotel*, and learn some Torah on his sightseeing trips. Each of these things infuses a Jew in Israel with a dose of spiritual adrenaline and fills the world with light. And there is a good chance that he will have a great time here, too.

Maybe even better than if he had decided to vacation in Honolulu. Because chances are, that for the first time in his life, he will feel like a genuine Jew, and not like a stranger in someone else's land. If he is crazy for beaches, we have beaches, too. And if he loves golf, there is even a fine golf course in the country. And as far as Jewish kids go, ask them yourselves. They usually say that they had the best time of their lives. All in all, Israel can be pretty cool.

Surveys reveal that only about 15% of Diaspora Jews have visited Israel. To me, that's embarrassing. How can it be that G-d gave us back our homeland and so many Jews don't come? You can say it is hard to move to a country far away, but what's the big deal about coming for a visit? It certainly isn't because of the money. Snorkeling in the Caribbean, and enjoying a gondola ride along stinking Venician canals costs about the same.

Regarding the claim that visiting Israel is dangerous, this simply isn't true. Over a million tourists come to Israel each year. Over the last ten years, maybe a handful of them were the victims of terrorist killings. Statistically, there is more danger for a tourist in the mountains of South America, the highways of France, and the bars of Bangkok.

So, this summer, when you are checking out your vacation options, be brave, be Jewish, and make the Holy Land number one on your list.

But I Love Her!

We have written about programs like Birthright in the past. Sure, it's a great thing to send young Jews to Israel for an inspirational visit. If even one Jew ends up marrying another Jew because of it, then all of the millions of dollars are worth it. But, after these kids return to their college campuses and their enticing *shiksa* classmates, with their mini-skirts, and blond hair and blue eyes, their experience in Israel will all too often turn into a fond memory, along with snapshots they can show to the non-Jews that they marry. If he is still charged up from his visit, maybe Bernie will insist that Brigitte undergo some worthless conversion. Maybe he'll get her to light Sabbath candles and tell their kids that they're Jews. And when they grow up, maybe Bernie's gentile children will pass themselves off as the real thing and get some Jew to marry them. What a mess it will be! There will even be "Jewish" weddings where both the bride and groom are gentiles! Soon in America, you won't be able to know if the person you are marrying is really a Jew, or if he or she innocently believes they're Jewish because that's what their parents told them, and the rabbis and temples and Jewish establishment all went along with the charade.

There's only one thing I can say about it. *Gevalt!*

Quicksand

It's like a man who was walking past a swamp when he noticed someone drowning in quicksand. He reached out his hand to save the person, but the sinking man spit in his face.

"Grab my hand," the rescuer insisted.

"Leave me alone!" the drowning man yelled back.

"You're sinking in quicksand!" the rescuer answered.

"This isn't quicksand," the drowning man replied. "It's a miracle mud bath filled with healthy minerals. I'm in the middle of a treatment."

I don't mind wiping the spit off my face in my efforts to rescue my drowning brothers and sisters who are sinking in the quicksand of *galut*. Actually, I have a spit spam installed on my computer that filters out saliva. If any gets through, I keep a package of wipes at my side to wipe off the glop. So, I'm protected. Anyway, I don't let a handful of hawkers discourage me. In the time that I have been writing this blog, close to a million visitors have clicked on, so what's the big deal about a little digital abuse? The vast silent majority of readers appreciate what I write, and I receive many emails to prove it.

Like I've said, it isn't their fault that their minds are closed to the message. In addition to the reasons we've already cited, Rabbi Kook explains that the spiritual pollution of the Diaspora is so thick that a Jew is unable to think straight.

He writes:

“It is impossible for a Jew to be devoted and faithful to his contemplations, logical reasonings, conceptualizations, and imaginations when he is outside the Land of Israel, compared to the quality of their faithfulness in *Eretz Yisrael*.

“Revelations of holiness, on whatever level, are clean in *Eretz Yisrael*, while outside of the Land, they are mixed with abundant dross and impure husks (*kelipot*)” (Orot, 1:4).

Simply put, outside of the Land of Israel there is a lot of spiritual pollution and static. The poisonous impurity of foreign cultures, religions, and ideologies, pollutes the environment of *galut* and seeps by osmosis into the brains of everyone living there. Instead of a healthy, normal “*Jewish kup*” they have a “*goyisha kup*” which prevents them from understanding the deep foundations of Judaism, including the need to live in their own Jewish Land.

Rabbi Kook continues:

“The faculty of imagination in the Land of Israel is lucid and clear, and pure, ready for the revelation of Divine truth and prophecy and its lights.

“In contrast, the faculty of imagination which is found in the lands of the gentile nations is ugly, clouded in darkness and in shadows of defilement and pollution. It cannot rise to the heights of *kedusha* (holiness).

“Because the intellect and the imagination are bound up together, and interact one upon the other, the intellect which is outside the Land of

Israel is incapable of being illuminated with the light which exists in *Eretz Yisrael*" (Orot, 1:5).

Granted, Rabbi Kook says it far more eloquently than I do, but the message is clear - at least to the clear-headed Jews blessed with living in Israel. Growing up in *galut*, surrounded by gentile neighbors, sparkling Christmas trees, *shiksa* co-eds, the Star Spangled Banner at ballgames, People Magazine, health clubs loaded with Sallys, Wendys, and Janes, all-night singles bars, Presidents like Jimmy Carter and Hussein Obama, Thanksgiving traditions and the Fourth of July, coupled with the overwhelming spiritual darkness of America, all of this can make *Eretz Yisrael* seem irrelevant to Jewish life.

If you don't understand what Rabbi Kook is saying, that's proof in itself that he's right.

Secret Jews

There are Jews with secrets, and secret Jews. There are Jews who know the secret that the holiday of *Succot*, as well as all of the Jewish holidays, are integrally bound up with *Eretz Yisrael*, and there are secret Jews who hide their *succah* booths from view.

For the ten days in Israel, in whatever direction you look, chances are you will see a *succah*. On front lawns, in driveways, in parking lots, on restaurant sidewalks, on the terraces of buildings, and on rooftops. In the Diaspora, the opposite is true. Unless you happen to be in one of the 5 or 6 Ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods scattered around the globe, chances are you won't see a *succah* at all. Take a walk from one end of Los Angeles to the other and there won't be a *succah* in sight. In Paris and London, you would never know that a Jewish Festival has arrived. Diaspora *succahs*, if they exist, are hidden away on back lawns, or in back alleyways, so that the *goyim* won't shoot flaming arrows at them and set them burning to heaven in a blaze of smoke. In the villas of wealthy Jews, you might discover a *succah* inside the house under a pull-back roof, so that the neighbors don't have to know that Orthodox Jews live inside. That's the sad state of affairs when you are a secret Jew living amongst the *goyim*.

Yes, we have many problems in Israel, but we don't have to be secret Jews. We do not have to hide our *succot* in the back of our homes. We can proudly construct them in our driveways and front lawns without worrying about vandals or burglars or unfriendly police. In the Diaspora, a front lawn *succah* sticks out like the gaudy statues that Beverly Hills Arabs like to erect on their lawns. In Israel, no one takes a

second look. *Succahs* are natural in Israel. They are a part of the landscape. People can dine in them in peace, and sleep comfortably in them all night without the slightest disturbance.

The renowned Torah scholar, the Gaon of Vilna, emphasized that only two mitzvot are performed with all of one's body – the *mitzvah* of dwelling in the *succah* and the *mitzvah* of living in *Eretz Yisrael*. The *lulav*, *etrog*, myrtle, willow, and palm branch are all indigenous to *Eretz Yisrael*. The festive pilgrimage to the Jerusalem Temple and the joyous “*Simchat Beit HaShoevah*” can only be performed in *Eretz Yisrael*.

During my first year as a *baal t'shuva* returning to the Torah, when the holiday of *Succot* came along, I erected four poles on the roof of the six-story apartment building where I was living in Manhattan. Not having learned the laws of the festival, I stretched a blanket over the poles as a *succah* roof and slept outdoors in the wind throughout the holiday. Though my makeshift *succah* was invalid and not a *succah* at all, I am sure that G-d was pleased with the well-meaning oddball on that lonely New York City roof. The next year, I was invited to spend the first *Yom Tov* of *Succah* at the home of a *shaliach* from Israel who was working on an *aliyah* project in New York. When it started to rain at the beginning of the meal, he ordered his family to abandon the *succah* and move everything into the house. I refused, saying that I was staying in the *succah* since Rabbi Nachman of Breslov taught that the *mitzvah* of *succah* is a *segulah* (special blessing) for coming to *Eretz Yisrael*. My host argued that the halachah stated that a person could leave his *succah* because of the discomfort and health hazard of rain, but I stubbornly stayed in the rain-drenched *succah* all night. Five minutes after the *Yom Tov* ended, the telephone rang. It was a coworker of the

shaliach from Israel. He said that they needed me to accompany a TV film crew that was flying to Israel in two days and that there was a free El Al ticket for me waiting at JFK.

“You see,” I told my startled friend. “Rabbi Nachman was right!”

Hag Samaoch!

Holy Genes

America is the land of the dollar. France is the land of perfume. Russia is the land of vodka. And Israel is the Land of *Hashem*.

Avraham *Avinu's* foremost craving was to serve *Hashem*. To fulfill this desire, he searched for the place where he could achieve an intimate closeness to the Almighty. The *Zohar* relates that with his *Ruach HaKodesh* (Divine Inspiration) Avraham was able to make a radar sweep of the globe and get a readout of the spiritual character of each location in the world. He discerned that *Hashem* had appointed a different celestial minister to rule over each country. But when he came to the central point of the world, and tried to zero in on its character, his spiritual radar failed. He couldn't get a reading. The ruling influence over this one place was recondite and hidden. This zone was so exalted and remote, no matter how fervently he concentrated, he could not fathom the origin of the providence ruling over that place. He understood that this was the very place he needed to reach, since all other lesser celestial powers emanated from there, and the power that ruled there, ruled over all other spheres. When Avraham attained this recognition, *Hashem* said to him, "*Lech lecha – get thee forth from thy land to the Land that I will show thee*" – to this unique and secret place.

The *Zohar* explains:

"When *Hashem* perceived Avraham's efforts and desire, he straightaway revealed Himself to him and said, '*Get thee forth,*' so as to know thy true self; '*from thy land,*' from that side of the world to which thou was attached up to now; '*and from thy kindred,*' from that wisdom that you relied on from the calculation of stars; '*and from thy father's*

house,’ that you not heed thy father, even if thou could hope to receive from thy father’s house prosperity in the world – therefore get thee gone from this wisdom and this consideration.... And I shall show thee that which thou was not able to discover - the power of that recondite and obscure Land” (Zohar, Lech Lecha, 78a).

Immediately, Avraham *Avinu* set forth on the journey, without knowing where he was going, without waiting for a free ticket, without knowing if there were already Jewish communities there with synagogues, mikvahs, yeshiva day schools, vacant villas, and kosher gyms, like there are in Israel today. He went without questioning if it was dangerous to live there, or if he and his children would have to serve in the army. He didn’t even bother to ask if he would be able to make a decent living. He went forth, without even “*Nefesh B’ Nefesh*” to help him, simply trusting in *Hashem*.

Of course, the recondite power that rules over the Land of Israel is *Hashem* Himself, and not any celestial angel, as the Torah attests, “*The Land that the eyes of Hashem are upon it from the beginning of the year to the end.*” This is the understanding behind the *halacha* brought down in the *Gemara* (Ketubot 110B):

“In all generations and times, a Jew should live in *Eretz Yisrael*, even in a city where the majority of residents are idol worshippers, and not live outside of the Land, even in a city where the majority of residents are Jews. For everyone who lives outside of the Land is like someone who has no G-d, as it says, ‘*To give you the Land of Canaan to be your G-d*’ (Vayikra 25). Can it be that everyone who does not live in the Land has no G-d? Rather, it comes to teach that everyone who lives outside of

the Land is like someone who worship idols. This is why David said, *‘For they have driven me out this day from being joined to the inheritance of the L-rd, saying, Go and serve other gods’* (Shmuel 1, 26:19). Did someone actually tell David to go and worship other gods? Rather this comes to teach that anyone who lives outside of the Land is like someone who worships idols.”

This is because *Hashem* has appointed celestial ministers to rule over the countries of the world. As the Ramban explains, outside of the Land, the prayers of a Jew and the Torah he learns are carried up to the celestial minister who rules over that land, and not straight to *Hashem*. This gives strength to the angel, and thus to the foreign land and culture which the angel personifies. In this sense, serving *Hashem* outside of the Land is like serving other gods, i.e., serving the angels who preside over the lands of the gentiles. Only in the Land of Israel can a Jew serve *Hashem* directly without having to contend with any intermediary powers (Ramban on the Torah, Achrei Mot, 18:25).

This is the reason that Avraham *Avinu* wanted to come to Israel, so that he could worship *Hashem* directly without intervening celestial messengers. Because we are the children of Avraham *Avinu*, we share his genes. As the Ramban explains, the deeds of our holy forefathers are signs for us to follow. Just as Avraham went forth to the Land of Israel, trusting in G-d, we all can, too.

Secret of Garbage

We do not hide the fact that there is a lot of garbage in Israel. There is garbage in the Prime Minister's office. There is garbage in the Knesset. There is garbage in the justice department and in the public educational system. There is garbage in the media. I am not ashamed of the garbage. I am proud of it. The fact that there is a lot of garbage means that there is also a tremendous amount of good.

What is the function of garbage? To help us understand this question, let's use the example of food. Garbage is the refuse that is left over from the edible food. For example, garbage is the peel of a banana, or the husk of an orange, or the shell of a pistachio nut. The fruit is eaten and the peel is discarded by throwing it into the trash. Until the banana is ripe, the peel serves to guard it. Though eventually the peel will turn into garbage, it plays a vital function in the development and growth of the fruit.

In a language more eloquent than mine, Rabbi Kook explains that the garbage and evil husks that we see in our time come to guard the budding fruit of Redemption and allow it to develop and grow. On the one hand, the light of Redemption is so powerful, it cannot be revealed all at once. Just as a person cannot stare up at the sun in its zenith, the world would be blinded if G-d were to reveal Himself, in all of His splendor and glory, without any filter or screen. In this sense, the husks of garbage in Israel, in the many forms they assume, serve to shield the world from the great growing light of Redemption within, until the proper vessels are built, so that we can become gradually accustomed to the light. The initial vessel is the Statehood of Israel, with all of its

physical infrastructure such as our airports, highways, hospitals, sewage systems, government, and the like. The next vessels are things like prophecy, the Sanhedrin, the *Beit HaMikdash*, and the Kingship of David, for which we all dream. Precisely because people lack the vessels to contain the immense Divine light of Redemption, they can easily fall into spiritual rebellion and disbelief. This accounts for the heresy and *chutzpah* of our times. Nonetheless, while the headlines are focused on the political corruption in Israel, on the Intifadas and work strikes, quietly, beneath this husk of evil, dozens of new yeshivas are opened, cities and settlements are built, a new advanced satellite is developed, a new insect-free lettuce is produced, medical innovations advance, more of our scattered exiles are gathered, and more and more Jewish children are born. All of these are aspects of *Mashiach* and the holy vessels of nationhood that we need to build. “We don’t have to worry about the Israelis,” the United States Secretary of State assures the President. “Look at all the problems they have.” That’s true when you focus on the darkness of the husks and don’t see the great light within. But one day soon, the world will wake up in surprise and discover that the State of Israel has become #1. Like it was in the days of Solomon. Just like it should be. Like it will be soon.

Everything that the Almighty has created, He has created it to manifest His glory. This includes garbage. Since it is G-d’s will that the Jewish People worship Him and rebuild their Statehood on the foundations of the Torah, can it be that He has servants working in an opposite manner creating mountains of garbage which counteract everything the Master has decreed? How can He allow all of this trash?

To explain this paradox, the Zohar teaches, in the famous parable of the harlot, that the purpose of evil is to bring forth the will of G-d. While the king wants his son to live a moral life and not succumb to temptation, he secretly hires a harlot and instructs her to seduce the youth, in order to test his obedience to his father's teachings. To resist her wiles and charms, the prince has to summon all of his inner resources and strengths. When he succeeds, the king grants him the highest of prizes and honors. Who caused all of this grandeur to come to the prince? The harlot! (Zohar, Shemot, 163A).

Just as each one of us is called upon to conquer our evil inclinations in our personal lives, we, as a Nation, are also summoned to separate the holy from the garbage in our national lives as well. This is the process of "*birur*" or selection that the Jewish Nation is experiencing today. This estrangement from our own holy sources is but a passing illness. After two thousand years of exile among the nations of the world, we have returned to *Eretz Yisrael* to build our own unique Jewish State. But when we come back from our wanderings, our luggage is filled with both good things and bad. We have learned about socialism, and communism, capitalism, and democracy. In our school of hard knocks, we have learned how to be writers, scientists, statesmen, and soldiers. In the long school of *galut*, we have absorbed Christian concepts, liberalism, secularism, immoral practices, corrupt dealings, and heretical teachings in all sizes and shapes. It is our job to sift out the good from the garbage and to reestablish our Nation on the basis of Torah. The more trash that there is, the harder each one of us has to work. The darker the husks, the more we have to strive to increase Torah in order to spread its light. Just as the dregs serve to preserve a

fine wine, so does the existence of evil come to force the champions of spirituality and goodness to climb to greater heights, until they can reveal the glorious, transcendental “ism” of Judaism, the paucity of which led to the spiritual rebellion and heresy of the past. In a nutshell, the more corruption, immorality, and evil, the holier we all have to be.

Rabbi Kook writes that although holiness, goodness, and faith will seem to suffer and weaken in the early stages of Nation’s rebuilding, this is in reality the stimulus for the magnificent ascent that follows. “For after the decay of the refuse, the light of splendor and holiness will immediately begin to grow on healthy, holy foundations” (Orot HaTechiya, 52).

But to bring about this world-perfecting rectification, you have to be engaged in the battle. If you want to participate in the Redemption, you can’t sit on the sidelines, thousands of miles away, afraid to get dirty and do the Divine work of selection by keeping away from the garbage. You have to buckle on your boots, grab your buckets and brooms, and climb onto the dump with the rest of us here. The garbage is waiting for you. And, also an incredible, indescribable good. If you come with a willing heart and a firm trust in G-d, then you won’t even notice the mud on your shoes. I promise.

Secret of *Eretz Yisrael*

If it is so obvious from reading the Torah that G-d wants the Jewish People to live in the Land of Israel, why are so many Jews still living in foreign lands? This past Friday, thousands of Jews in Israel traveled to the ancient cemetery in Safed to pay respects to the renowned Kabbalist, the holy Arizal, on the anniversary of his *yahrtzeit*. Rabbi Chaim Vital, the foremost student of the Ari, writes in his preface to Ari's^[SP12] book, "*Etz HaChaim*," that the prolongation of the exile and its tribulations are because the learning of the secrets of Torah has been neglected. In a similar light, Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook writes that due to an alienation from the secrets of Torah, the supreme importance of a Jew's connection to *Eretz Yisrael* is not properly understood. In his classic treatise, "*Orot*," Rabbi Kook bases his deep insights into the renaissance of the Jewish nation in *Eretz Yisrael* on the esoteric teachings of the Arizal and the holy *Zohar*, dressing up Kaballistic concepts in the language of developing nationhood and rebirth. He writes:

"By alienating oneself from the secrets of G-d, the highest *segulot* (treasures) of the deep Divine life become extraneous, secondary matters which do not enter the depths of the soul, and as a result, the most potent force of the individual's and of the nation's soul will be missing; and the exile is found to be pleasant in its own accord. For to someone who only understands the superficial level, nothing basic will be lacking in the absence of the Land of Israel, the Jewish Kingdom, and all of the facets of the nation in its built form."

What is Rabbi Kook saying in this difficult sentence?

He is saying that someone who understands only the superficial level of Judaism will feel nothing lacking if he lives far away from the Land of Israel, in a foreign country, in a gentile land, under a gentile government. A person like this lives a truncated Judaism that focuses on the individual and the individual *mitzvot* that he or she can do. Without a deeper understanding of the Torah, which is, first and foremost, the national constitution of the Nation of Israel as a whole, teaching us how to live in our unique Holy Land, he will not feel the need for a Jewish Land of his own, nor for a Jewish country with a Jewish army, nor for a life arranged according to the Hebrew calendar, nor for any of the other foundations of national Israeli life. His focus is on *Shabbat*, *kashrut*, and *tefillin*. He thinks that in order to perform them, he does not need *Eretz Yisrael*. He is satisfied with the individual percepts which he feels he can perform just as well in *Chutz L'Aretz*, and thus the exile finds favor in his eyes. Being estranged from the national component of Torah, but he does not miss having his own Jewish Homeland. The opposite is true – he enjoys the *galut*. He enjoys his work, his community, the education he can give to his children, and the opportunity he has to experience the “best of both worlds” – his Judaism and the gentile world around him. If there is an inner need to live in Israel, or to live there because it is the true place of the Torah’s performance, he does not feel it. Therefore, something will be missing in his yearning for Salvation, in his yearning for Jerusalem, and for the Temple, the Sanhedrin, for prophecy, for Jewish Kingship, and for all of the aspects of the Jewish nation in its rebuilt form. To his way of thinking, the concept of nationhood has nothing to do with Judaism, or with being “*Frum*.” He fails to understand that the highest worship and sanctification of G-d comes through the life of the Nation of Israel, in

the Land of Israel, and not through the deeds of the individual Jew in the exile.

One of the great contributions of the Arizal was revealing the relationship between transgression and rectification, known as *tikun*. For instance, the sin of the Spies in the wilderness fell on the night of *Tisha B'Av*. Our Sages tell us that their lack of faith in G-d, expressed in their refusing to journey on to Israel, and their rejection of the supreme importance of the Land of Israel to the Jewish People and Torah, planted the seeds for the future national destruction and exile. Because their sin was in despising the cherished Land, the rectification is to love the Land and to make every possible effort to live there.

On the eve of *Tisha B'Av*, here are some deep Torah teachings to help awaken our love for the Land and increase our yearning to live there.

The Arizal taught that just by eating the fruits of *Eretz Yisrael*, a person's fear and reverence for G-d is increased.

In a similar light, the great Torah master, the Chatam Sofer, taught that just saying the words "*Eretz Yisrael*" increases a person's *kedushah* (holiness).

The Hasidic master, Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, who based much of his teachings on the secrets which the Arizal revealed, taught his students that the holiness of *Eretz Yisrael* is the epitome of holiness, encompassing all other levels of holiness, and that genuine enlightenment and Torah wisdom come only in the Land of Israel. Repeatedly, he stated that only through the special spiritual treasures of *Eretz Yisrael* can a Jew rise up to the highest levels in the service of

G-d. In addition, he taught that true faith and prayer are only possible in *Eretz Yisrael*, for it is here that prayer ascends to the worlds above (Likutei Etzot, Eretz Yisrael).

He states: “When a person attains to the level of the Land of Israel, he is worthy of being called ‘*a man of strength and valor.*’ Before he attains this level, ‘*Let not him who girdeth on his armor boast as the one who takes it off.*’ But when he has gone through the battle successfully, he is worthy of the name ‘*a man of war.*’”

In addition to deepening our Torah learning, how can we increase our love and yearning for the Land of Israel?

Rabbi Nachman says: “Pray to G-d to give you desire and yearning for the Land of Israel. Then you will succeed in reaching there.”

True, making *aliyah* is a very difficult *mitzvah*. In addition to the great joy and spiritual elevation that it brings, it is filled with challenges. Talmud teaches that it is impossible to come to the Land of Israel without difficulties and suffering, and that to attain three things, Torah, the World to Come, and *Eretz Yisrael*, self-sacrifice is needed. Rabbi Nachman explains that “the root of all the difficulties and suffering lies in the slanderous image of the Land which is put about by the wicked. They are the source of all of the obstacles. But the power of the Torah which we draw into ourselves enables us to overcome all the obstacles, difficulties, and suffering. The more profound a person’s grasp of the Torah, and the greater *tikun* he brings about through his attainment, the greater his victory will be over the obstacles, and he will succeed in reaching the Land of Israel.”

May we all be so worthy soon.

In Mom's nursing home, there's an automatic bicycle machine. All you have to do is strap the old timer's feet onto the pedals and turn on the motor. The machine does all the work. It gets the blood circulating, even though the cyclist is just going through the motions, but of course it's not like riding a real bicycle.

For a lot of people, that's what *Seder* Night is like. They go through the motions of reading the *Haggadah*, eating *matzah*, and drinking four cups of wine, but they don't internalize the message of the *Seder* and act on its teachings. Like with the automatic bicycle, there's a lot of action, but they really aren't going anywhere.

With *Pesach* approaching, it is appropriate to ask what is the message of *Pesach* and the Passover *Seder*?

Pesach is called the holiday of freedom. It commemorates our freedom from *galut*. That initial *galut* (exile) happened to be in *Mitzrayim* (Egypt), but it could have been in Brooklyn, Toronto, Manchester, or Melbourne as well. For a Jew, exile means living outside of the Land of Israel. Some exiles seem worse than others, but as long as a Jew is living outside the Land of Israel, he or she is in exile. He's living in someone else's land. He is a stranger. A minority. Nothing is his. Everything belongs to the gentiles who rule there. Sure, there are Jews who will protest and say, "I'm an American just like everyone else," or "I'm a Canadian just like everyone else," but this is just a delusion. A Jew is a Jew. He is a member of the Children of Israel. He may have a birth certificate from the United States and a US passport, but those are external to his true essence, like the travel decals you stick on a

suitcase. Because he is a Jew, he has an eternal, inner attachment to the Torah and its commandments. Just as he can't say, "I don't believe in the Torah, therefore I don't have any obligation to keep kosher," he also can't say, "Because I was born in America, I don't have any connection to *Eretz Yisrael*." No way. Because he is a Jew, he is part of G-d's gift of *Eretz Yisrael* to the Jewish People. He is a part of the Divine commandment to live there. *Eretz Yisrael* is the Land of the Jews, not Canada or Japan. As long as he is outside of the Land of Israel, he is in exile. And if he thinks that it is not exile, because he feels free there and the gentiles accept him, it is exile all the same. Ironically, the worse an exile is, the better it is for the Jew, because at least he realizes that he is in exile. When the exile is comfortable, like in Brooklyn and Toronto, a Jew can easily fool himself into thinking that he isn't in exile at all, and that's the worse bondage there is.

So, first and foremost, the holiday of *Pesach* comes to teach us that G-d chose us as his special Nation and freed us from bondage to take us out of exile and establish us in *Eretz Yisrael*, as the *Haggadah* begins:

"This is the bread of affliction that our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt. All who needs may come and eat, all who need may come and share in our *Pesach* meal. This year we are here, next year may we be in the Land of Israel. This year we are slaves, next year may we be free men."

This means that the goal of our lives should be to leave the exile and live in the Land of Israel. Our Sages are teaching us that no matter where we recite the *Haggadah*, whether it be in Warsaw, Moscow, Berlin, New York, or sunny Miami Beach, we are in exile. We are in

bondage in a foreign land, in a foreign culture. Only when we live in *Eretz Yisrael* are we free men.

This teaching is repeated at end of the *Seder* when we declare, “Next year in Jerusalem!”

Therefore, this year, make your *Seder* Night meaningful. Make it real. Don’t just go through the motions. Strive to internalize its teachings. In the great Divine illumination that comes on *Pesach* night, understand with all of your being that you are living in bondage in exile amongst the gentiles, in a foreign land, and all you have to do to get free is pack up a few clothes and hop on a plane to Israel. Everything else is here waiting.

It’s as simple as that!

Super Jew

For several years now, I have been trying to help people understand the simple truth that a Jew belongs in Israel. Many people find the concept difficult to grasp because they have never learned about the intrinsic unity of *Am Yisrael*, the Torah, and *Eretz Yisrael*. It simply isn't taught in the Diaspora. Because of the length of the exile, Jews have come to identify with the places where they live, believing they are Americans, or Frenchmen, or Swiss. They learn about the individual precepts of Judaism: *tefillin*, *Talmud Torah*, keeping kosher, and the like, but they are never introduced to the bigger picture. After all, if the rabbis taught their congregants that they were supposed to be living in Israel, it would mean the end of the Diaspora's communities – and their rabbis.

So, I will try once again to blow the dust off of old and spider-webbed light bulbs with the hope that some Jew, somewhere in the world, may wake up to the bigger picture of what Judaism is really all about.

Before we perform a *mitzvah*, we recite a blessing in which we praise G-d for sanctifying us with His commandments. The *mitzvot* add to our holiness. When we eat kosher food, our bodies become holier. When we study Torah, our minds become holier. When we wave the *lulav*, our hands and arms become more sanctified. When we dwell in the *succah*, everything becomes holier, our eating, our talking, our studying, our sleeping. Kabbalists refer to this as "*ohr hamakif*," being surrounded by G-d's encompassing light. In the *succah* we are enveloped by holiness. It saturates us and elevates all of our existence, like being in a spiritual sauna.

Now if our *succah* booth is in the Land of Israel, then it is like we are in a sauna inside of a giant sauna. We get a colossal, magnified saturation of holiness. For all of the Land of Israel is a giant *succah*, surrounded by G-d's encompassing light. Just by living in the Land of Israel, everything in our life is sanctified in G-d's encompassing Presence – our homes, our cars, our jobs, our military service, our speech, our thoughts, our deeds.

And because we are surrounded by the holy geodesic bubble of the Land of Israel, all of the Jews living here are joined together, bumping into each other like atoms in an atomic centrifuge, each one giving added power to the next, so that everything a Jew does is multiplied scores and scores of times, making him into a bigger Jew. By living in the encompassing light of the Land of Israel, a Jew joins the “*CLAL*,” the encompassing unity of the Jewish People. His private life becomes attached to the greater life of the *CLAL*. Instead of being an individual Jew, he becomes a NATIONAL Jew. His life becomes magnified in his bonding with the NATION. Just by going to the grocery store he is helping to rebuild the Jewish People in the Land of Israel, in fulfillment of prophecy and our prayers. That's why the Chofetz Chaim declared that a *mitzvah* performed in Israel has 20 times more *mitzvah* power than the same *mitzvah* performed anywhere else. Because of the mega-power of the *CLAL*, and the incredible chain reaction that occurs when we are gathered together in our Land.

Now do you know^[SP14]^[SP15] why going to Israel is called *aliyah*? It means “to go up.” Even a Jew who lives on top of the tallest mountain in Switzerland is said to make *aliyah* when he moves to Israel because of the great spiritual ascent he achieves by coming to the Holy Land and

attaching his former private life to the encompassing, mega-life of the *Clal*.

Still don't understand? Never mind. Just go out and buy a ticket.

Review Lesson 613

Once again, since one of the most fundamental foundations of Judaism is the *mitzvah* of living in Israel, we will review some of the things we've emphasized over the course of this blog. This is necessary because there are always newcomers who may not have been exposed to these understandings and laws. In addition, because of the supreme importance of our conquest and settlement of the Land of Israel, as the necessary prerequisite in establishing the Kingdom of G-d in the world, the evil inclination employs all of its wiles to confuse Jews, in order to discourage and prevent them from performing this all-important commandment.

The Torah states in this week's portion of *Reah*:

"For you shall pass over the Yarden to go in to possess the Land which the L-rd your G-d gives you, and you shall possess it and dwell therein" (Devarim, 11:31).

Here we once again have a clear commandment to conquer and settle in the Land of Israel.

The next verse states:

"And you shall observe to do all of the statutes and laws which I set before you this day. These are the statutes and laws which you shall observe to do in the Land which the L-rd G-d of thy fathers gives thee to possess all the days that you live upon the earth" (Ibid, 12:1).

First of all, it is clear that the Torah is talking about *Eretz Yisrael*, and not about Australia, South Africa, Tahiti, or Monsey, New York.

Secondly, the verse clearly states that a Jew is expected to always live in the Land of Israel, as it says, *“to possess all the days that you live upon the earth.”*

Is something not perfectly clear with this?

The Torah doesn't make the obligation to live in Israel dependent on any conditions, by saying that you have to live here if you like the weather, or if you approve of the government, or if the religiousity of the inhabitants is up to your stature. Like with every other *mitzvah*, we are not to set ourselves, and our own personal opinions, over what G-d commands us to do. He makes the rules. Period.

Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook emphasized that, “There are religious Jews who express a type of criticism and say, ‘If the State of Israel were run according to our lifestyle and spirit, then we would accept it. Until then we abstain from it....This is a tragic mistake.”

Just as settling and building the Land is a great *mitzvah*, people who discourage others from performing this all-important commandment are committing a grave sin. Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook stressed:

“In our generation, we are in a situation of war, and we must be careful over what we say. We must strengthen the conquest and settlement of the Land with intelligence and reason, boldness and strength, and by guarding our speech. We must guard against language which leads to discouragement. The Torah forbids this weakening of others by saying, *‘Lest his brother's heart melt like his heart’* (Devarim, 20:8). In our time, weak-heartedness is as forbidden as pork.”

Whether this discouragement comes from diehard leftists in Israel, or from talkbackers on the Internet whose evil inclinations have gotten the best of them, all of their pseudo-intellectualism and highfalutin speeches are as *traf* as pork.

The Good Land

This week's Torah portion begins with Moshe begging *Hashem* to allow him to enter the Land of Israel:

"I beseech Thee, let me go over and see the good Land that is beyond the Jordan, that good mountain and the Lebanon" (Devarim, 3:25).

Commentators point out that the Hebrew word for beseech, "*Va'etchanan*," has a *gematria* (numerical value) of 515, indicating that Moshe beseeched *Hashem* with 515 different supplications, so great was his desire to make *aliyah*.

I once heard Rabbi Sholom Gold of Har Nof ask an interesting question. Why does Moshe repeat the word "*good*" in the verse? He answered that Moshe was actually asking two things from *Hashem*. First, he was asking for permission to enter the good Land. Second, he was asking for *Hashem's* blessing that once he was in the Land, he would continue to see the Land in a good light.

Rabbi Gold explained that there is a *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) that causes a person to see the Land of Israel in a negative perspective. The Spies are the classic example of this tragic transgression. Even though they were outstanding Torah scholars and leaders of the tribes, they came back from their tour of Israel with a critical report, highlighting the dangers they encountered. Instead of emphasizing the good of the Land, they succumbed to their *yetzer hara* and emphasized the things which they subjectively experienced as bad. For instance, having seen many funerals during their trip, they reported that it is a land that "*devours its inhabitants*." Rashi explains that in reality, *Hashem* was doing them a favor, arranging that there would be many funerals so

that the Jews could go about their mission undetected (Bamidbar, 13:32). Rather than seeing that the Land of Israel was indeed good, as *Hashem* had promised, the Spies interpreted events in the Land as bad, in order to justify their corrupted personal desire of remaining in *galut*, so they wouldn't have to give up their positions of honor, knowing that a new type of leadership would be needed in *Eretz Yisrael*. (Mesillat Yesharim, Ch 11, in the discussion on Honor; also Zohar, 3:158).

This same corrupted vision continues today on the part of a few bitter, couch potatoes who spend their days criticizing Israel on talkbacks all over the web. "This is no good, and that's no good, and this is immoral, and that is unjust, and this is like the Nazis, and that is like the Commies, and this is dangerous, and that is non-Jewish", ad infinitum. They self-righteously proclaim, "Until all of these terrible things are corrected, it is suicide to come on *aliyah*," thereby reenacting the sin of the Spies.

As the *Gaon of Vilna* wrote: "Many of those who sin in the great transgression of, '*They despised the cherished Land*,' and also many among them guardians of Torah, they will not know or understand that they are caught in the sin of the Spies in their many false ideas and empty claims...." (Kol HaTor, Ch.5).

This does not mean that one cannot point out problems with the State of Israel, or with government policies, or with our biased media, and the like. However, in doing so, the criticism must come forth from the fundamental confirmation that this is our one and only Land, and come heck and high water, we won't betray our love for it with an allegiance to any other lover.

Thus, to protect himself against the terrible spiritual illness of slandering the Land, Moshe praises the Land of Israel throughout the Torah portion, stressing over and over again that it is indeed a “*good Land*.”

The Sages of the Talmud followed Moshe’s example. At the end of tractate Ketubot, it is related that Rav Hanina would clear away debris from the roads of *Eretz Yisrael*, so that no one would speak derisively against the Land. When teaching their students, Rav Ami and Rav Asi would move from the shade to the sun, and from the sun to the shade. Rashi explains that they would move into the sun when the shade was too cold, and into the shade when the sun was too hot, so that no one should speak a bad word about the settlement of *Eretz Yisrael*.

How important it is, then, to view the settlement of Israel in a positive light.

Of course, a “good eye” is important in looking at everything in life, especially our families, our wives, our children, and our friends. The Mishna teaches that a “good eye” is the trait of our forefather, Avraham, and its opposite, the trait of the wicked Bilaam (Avot, 5:19).

But, here, I have to make a personal confession. There is one thing I simply cannot look at with a good eye, and that is the exile. True, until the establishment of the State of Israel, there was a positive value of sorts in the exile, in that via the punishment of *galut*, with its pogroms, persecutions, and sufferings, our sins were atoned for, in the same way that a sinner must serve time in hell, G-d forbid, in order to be purged of his transgressions. Plus there was to be an educational value in the

exile. Our being a persecuted minority among the gentile nations came to teach us to appreciate the importance of our own holy, Jewish Land.

But, tragically, something went wrong. Instead of loathing the exile, many of our brethren refuse to leave it.

What is this tragedy analogous to? To a rebellious child who is sent to sit in the bathroom in punishment for his wayward behavior. Finally, when the door is unlocked, the child announces that he prefers to stay in the bathroom rather than return to live in the house. True, there are sweet smelling soaps and perfumes in the bathroom to camouflage the stink, a marble sink counter, designer spotlights, and a wall-length mirror so that you can watch yourself sit on the can, but it is life in a toilet all the same.

May *Hashem* cure us of the evil of seeing the settlement of the Land of Israel in a negative light, and may we merit to rectify the sin of the Spies by loving the Land, seeing it with a good eye, and coming to live here in accordance with the will of the Almighty, as stated again and again and again in the Torah. Amen.