

ISRAEL

THE SPECIAL
SIGNIFICANCE
OF ERETZ
YISROEL





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Dear Friend,

It is with great pleasure that I introduce our fourth learning booklet to you.

As in the previous booklets We have incorporated the following features:

- An exciting and relevant topic
- An overview describing what you will be learning
- Learning material in English and (or) appropriately measured to fit into a 40 minute session
- A summary at the end

It is our hope that this project serves to broaden your knowledge of key Jewish understandings and inspires you to search for more.

We look forward to providing you with more cutting edge learning experiences in the near future.

Sincerely

Yehoshua Werde
Director

For all comments and suggestions please feel free to approach me or email to Director@Torahlp.com

Lesson Overview

Introduction: Israel in our Hearts

- Dershowitz: Israel at the center of attention
- Poem: My heart is in the east
- What's so special about Israel?
- Israel in our prayers

Part One: Physical Uniqueness of Israel

- Geographically: Israel at the crossroads
- Climate: Why no natural irrigation?
- Land of milk and honey. How so?
- Fascinating Fact: A desolate and flourishing land

Part Two: Spiritual Uniqueness of Israel

- The safest place in the world
- Land of Hashgacha Protis
- Holy by choice
- Holy because of spiritual sensitivity
- Best place for a Jew to connect with his holiness

Part Three: Israel our homeland

- What makes it our?
- Are we required to live there?
- Must we pack our bags and catch the next plane?
- Why didn't the Rebbe ever visit Israel?
- How can we live in Israel without actually living in Israel?

Introduction

ALAN DERSHOWITZ, INTRODUCTION TO WHAT ISRAEL MEANS TO ME

IT'S A TINY COUNTRY, BARELY THE SIZE OF NEW JERSEY. ITS POPULATION OF SIX MILLION RANKS IT AMONG THE LEAST POPULATED MEMBER STATES OF THE UNITED NATIONS. YET, WITH THE POSSIBLE EXCEPTION OF THE UNITED STATES...THE JEWISH NATION OF ISRAEL PROVOKES MORE PASSION, RECEIVES MORE MEDIA COVERAGE AND ENGENDERS MORE CRITICISM THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY IN THE WORLD TODAY. IT IS FAIR TO SAY THAT

FEW PEOPLE ARE NEUTRAL ABOUT ISRAEL

Even throughout the Golan, Eretz Yisroel has always occupied a special place in the heart of the Jew. As the famous poet Rabbi Yehuda Halevi expressed in his poem "In Arab Chains" written some 900 years ago:

RABBI YEHUDAH HALEVI, IN ARAB CHAINS

לְבִי בְּמִזְרַח וְאֲנֹכִי בְּסוֹף מְעָרָב
אֵיךְ אֶטְעָמָה אֶת אֲשֶׁר אֶכֶל וְאֵיךְ יַעֲרֵב
אֵיכָה אֲשַׁלֵּם נְדָרַי וְאֶסְרִי, בְּעוֹד
צִיּוֹן בְּחַבְלֵי אֲדוֹם וְאֲנִי בְּכַבְלֵי עֲרָב
יִקַּל בְּעֵינַי עֶזְבֵּי כָּל טוֹב סִפְרָד, כְּמוֹ
יִקַּר בְּעֵינַי רְאוֹת עֲפָרוֹת דְּבִיר נַחְרָב.

MY HEART IS IN THE EAST, AND I AM IN THE UTTERMOST WEST;

HOW CAN I FIND SAVOR IN FOOD? HOW SHALL IT BE SWEET TO ME?

HOW SHALL I RENDER MY VOWS AND MY BONDS, WHILE YET

ZION LIES BENEATH THE SHACKLES OF EDOM, AND I AM IN THE CHAINS OF ARABIA?

IT WOULD BE EASY FOR ME TO LEAVE ALL THE GOOD THINGS OF SPAIN --

AS IT IS PRECIOUS IN MY EYES TO SEE THE DUST OF THE DESOLATE SANCTUARY.

Three times a day, in Shmonah Esrei, we express our heartfelt prayers to Hashem to return to Eretz Yisroel:

FROM THE SHMONEH ESREI

וּתְחִינָה עֵינֵינוּ בְּשׁוֹבֵךְ לְצִיּוֹן בְּרַחֲמִים

MAY OUR EYES BEHOLD YOUR RETURN TO ZION IN MERCY.

What is so special about Eretz Yisroel? Why does it play such an important role in our lives? First we'll look at the physical qualities of the Land, then we'll explore what makes it holy.

Israel at the Crossroads

There are many advantages to the Land of Israel. One of the less commonly spoken of, but most highlighted in history, is the fact that Israel geographically lies at the crossroads between the two major continents of ancient civilization. As a well trodden travel route, it was a much sought after piece of real estate that many kings fought over its control. It appears that things haven't changed much in thousands of years. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan describes what is strategic about the geographic location of Eretz Yisroel:

RABBI ARYEH KAPLAN, JERUSALEM: EYE OF THE UNIVERSE

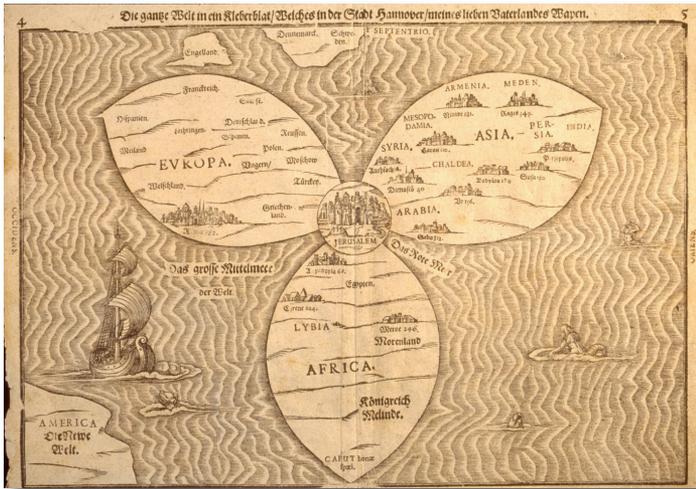
IF YOU LOOK AT A MAP YOU WILL SEE THAT THE GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL VIRTUALLY GUARANTEED THAT IT WOULD PLAY A KEY ROLE IN THE TIDES OF CIVILIZATION. THE OLD WORLD CONSISTED OF TWO GREAT LAND MASSES, EURASIA (EUROPE AND ASIA) AND AFRICA. IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO TRAVEL FROM EURASIA TO AFRICA WITHOUT PASSING THROUGH THE HOLY LAND. THEREFORE, EVERY CONQUEROR, EVERY CIVILIZATION THAT PASSED FROM ONE CONTINENT TO THE OTHER, HAD TO PASS THROUGH THE HOLY LAND AND COME IN CONTACT WITH THE JEW.

... BESIDES BEING A GATEWAY BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH, THE HOLY LAND IS PART OF THE KEYSTONE LINK BETWEEN EAST AND WEST. THERE ARE MOUNTAINS IN ISRAEL WHERE A CUP OF WATER SPILLED ON THE WESTERN SLOPE WILL EVENTUALLY FLOW INTO THE ATLANTIC OCEAN, WHILE ONE SPILLED ON THE EASTERN SLOPE WILL FLOW INTO THE PACIFIC. TODAY, THESE OCEANS ARE LINKED

SUEZ CANAL, BUT IN THE PAST, MOST CARAVAN ROUTES LINKING THE ATLANTIC AND PACIFIC PASSED DIRECTLY THROUGH THE HOLY LAND.

THE LAND OF ISRAEL WAS THEREFORE LITERALLY THE CROSSROADS OF CIVILIZATION.

In this map you can see how Yerushalayim is depicted as being the geographical center of the world (in fact, this was quite common in ancient maps):



In addition to its geographic location, Israel's climate is also unique. The posuk identifies Eretz Yisroel as a land distinguished from Egypt in the following ways:

DEVARIM 10:10-11

כי הארץ אשר אתה בא שמה לרשתה לא כארץ מצרים הוא אשר יצאתם משם אשר תזרע את זרעך והשקית ברגלך כגן הירק: והארץ אשר אתם עברים שמה לרשתה ארץ הרים ובקעת למטר השמים תשתה מים:

FOR THE LAND TO WHICH YOU ARE COMING TO POSSESS IS NOT

LIKE THE LAND OF EGYPT, OUT OF WHICH YOU CAME, WHERE YOU SOWED YOUR SEED AND WHICH YOU WATERED BY FOOT, LIKE A VEGETABLE GARDEN, BUT THE LAND, TO WHICH YOU PASS TO POSSESS IT, IS A LAND OF MOUNTAINS AND VALLEYS AND ABSORBS WATER FROM THE RAINS OF HEAVEN.

For better or for worse, one of the features that distinguishes Eretz Yisrael from other lands is its lack of natural irrigation. In Israel, water is a scarce commodity. The Kinneret is Israel's only major fresh water reserve today and fast days and prayers for rain are a common occurrence in Israel. If you've ever been to Israel in the winter months, everybody is talking about the need for rain.

Why did Hashem make it that in the "land of milk and honey" it should be so difficult to find water? The Rebbe explains:

LIKUTEI SICHOS VOL. 6 P. 30

פארוואס האט דער אויבערשטער איינגעשטעלט אזוי, "שלא תהא הארץ שותה אלא מלמעלן"? איז איינער פון די טעמים אויף דעם בכדי "שיהיו הכל תולין עיניהם כלפי מעלה": בעת א מענטש ווייס אז ער מוז אנקומען צו "מטר השמים", איז אפילו ווען ער האט א ריבוי השפעה, "תאכל ושבעת גו' וכל אשר ירבה לך", וועט עס אים פונדעסטועעגן אפהאלטן (אין א געוויסער מאס) פון ורם לבבך ושכחת את הוי' אלקיך", ווייל ער ווייס, אז וויפל ער זאל ניט טאן כל הענינים התלויים בו - חרישה זריעה וכו', מוז ער אלץ אנקומען צו דעם אויבערשטן.

בשעת ער געפינט זיך אין מצרים אבער, וואו דער אויבערשטער האט איינגעשטעלט אז די הנהגה זאל זיין בטבע, אז בתקופה מסוימת איז נילוס עולה און איז משקה די פעלדער - וויבאלד אז בעיני בשר זעט ער ניט אז ער דארף אנקומען צום

אויבערשטן, קען ער זיך איינרעדן אז "כחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה" און פארגעסן ח"ו אז הוא הנותן לך כח לעשות חיל".

WHY DID HASHEM SET UP A SITUATION IN WHICH ISRAEL'S RAIN ONLY COMES FROM ABOVE? ONE OF THE REASONS IS SO THAT, "IN THIS WAY EVERYONE WILL TURN THEIR EYES HEAVENWARD [BEREISHIS RABBAH 13]." WHEN A PERSON KNOWS THAT HE HAS TO RELY UPON THE "RAIN OF HEAVEN" THEN EVEN WHEN HE HAS AN ABUNDANCE HE IS PREVENTED FROM [MAKING THE MISTAKE DETAILED IN DEVARIM 8 "AND YOUR HERDS AND YOUR FLOCKS MULTIPLY, AND SILVER AND GOLD INCREASE, AND ALL THAT YOU HAVE INCREASES] AND YOUR HEART GROWS HAUGHTY, AND YOU FORGET HASHEM YOUR G-D." THIS IS BECAUSE THE PERSON KNOWS THAT NO MATTER HOW MUCH EFFORT HE PUTS INTO THE LAND BY PLOWING, PLANTING, ETC., HE STILL NEEDS TO COME [IN PRAYER] BEFORE HASHEM.

CONTRAST THIS WITH LIVING IN EGYPT, WHERE HASHEM ESTABLISHED THE NATURAL ORDER SUCH THAT AT SPECIFIC TIMES THE NILE RISES AND WATERS THE FIELDS. SINCE TO THE PHYSICAL EYE THIS HAPPENS WITHOUT ANY NEED TO [PRAY TO] HASHEM, A PERSON CAN TELL HIMSELF: "MY STRENGTH AND THE MIGHT OF MY HAND THAT HAS ACCUMULATED THIS WEALTH FOR ME [DEVARIM 8:17]" AND G-D FORBID, FORGET COMPLETELY [THE NEXT VERSE WHICH STATES, "BUT YOU MUST REMEMBER HASHEM YOUR G-D, FOR IT IS] HE THAT GIVES YOU STRENGTH TO ACQUIRE WEALTH."

Land of Milk and Honey

The Posuk describes Israel as a Land flowing with milk and honey. What does this mean? The Gemorah brings a comical interpretation

for the “land flowing with milk and honey:”

GEMARA KESUBOS 111B

רמי בר יחזקאל איקלע לבני ברק, חזנהו להנהו עיזי דקאכלן
תותי תאיני, וקנטיף דובשא מתאיני וחלבא טייף מנייהו ומיערב
בהדי הדדי, אמר: היינו זבת חלב ודבש.

RAMI BAR YEchezkel TRAVELLED TO Bnei BRak. THERE HE SAW GOATS EATING UNDER THE FIG TREES. HONEY WAS DRIPPING FROM THE FIGS, MILK WAS FLOWING FROM THE GOATS AND THEY MIXED TOGETHER ON THE GROUND. HE EXCLAIMED, ‘THIS IS IT, A LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY!’

But on a more serious note, what does it actually mean?

The Ramban (Shmos 3:8) writes that the key word in the verse is “flowing.” Fruit trees grow in many different terrains, but their produce overflow with nectar only when the land is especially fertile, when the trees are particularly well-nourished. Similarly, livestock survives in many habitats, but only overflow with milk when they are in particularly fertile pastures. Thus, a “land flowing with milk and honey” is indicative and symptomatic of a greater good—the fertility of the Promised Land.

The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Mishlei) explains that milk symbolizes superior quality, richness of taste, and nourishment. Honey represents sweetness. The goodness of Israel is both nourishing and pleasant. Some point out that honey and milk share a paradoxical quality. Honey is kosher, though it is produced by a non-kosher insect. Milk is kosher, though it comes from a cow whose meat may not be eaten together with milk. The goodness of Israel will often times come from places where it is least expected.

Compare the following two eye-witness descriptions of the Land of Israel. The first is from Josephus (Yoseph ben Matissyahu), a Jewish general turned Roman historian from the time of the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash two thousand years ago. The second is from the famous writer Mark Twain who describes his trip to Palestine in the year 1867.

JOSEPHUS, "THE JEWISH WARS", BOOK III 3:2

FOR THE WHOLE AREA IS EXCELLENT FOR CROPS OR PASTURAGE AND RICH IN TREES OF EVERY KIND, SO THAT BY ITS FERTILITY IT INVITES EVEN THOSE LEAST INCLINED TO WORK THE LAND. IN FACT, EVERY INCH OF IT HAS BEEN CULTIVATED BY THE INHABITANTS AND NOT A PARCEL GOES TO WASTE. IT IS THICKLY COVERED WITH TOWNS, AND THANKS TO THE NATURAL ABUNDANCE OF THE SOIL, THE MANY VILLAGES ARE SO DENSELY POPULATED THAT THE SMALLEST OF THEM HAS MORE THAN FIFTEEN THOUSAND INHABITANTS".

Mark Twain visited Israel in 1867, and published his impressions in his best-selling book *Innocents Abroad*. He described a desolate country – devoid of both vegetation and human population:

MARK TWAIN, INNOCENTS ABROAD, CH. 56

OF ALL THE LANDS THERE ARE FOR DISMAL SCENERY, I THINK PALESTINE MUST BE THE PRINCE. THE HILLS ARE BARREN, THEY ARE DULL OF COLOR, THEY ARE UNPICTURESQUE IN SHAPE. THE VALLEYS ARE UNSIGHTLY DESERTS FRINGED WITH A FEEBLE VEGETATION THAT HAS AN EXPRESSION ABOUT IT OF BEING SORROWFUL AND DESPONDENT. THE DEAD SEA AND THE SEA OF GALILEE SLEEP IN THE MIDST OF A VAST STRETCH OF HILL AND PLAIN WHEREIN THE EYE RESTS UPON NO PLEASANT TINT, NO STRIKING OBJECT, NO SOFT PICTURE DREAMING IN A PURPLE HAZE OR MOTTLED WITH THE SHADOWS OF THE CLOUDS. EVERY OUTLINE IS HARSH, EVERY FEATURE IS DISTINCT, THERE IS NO PERSPECTIVE—DISTANCE WORKS NO ENCHANTMENT HERE. IT IS A HOPELESS, DREARY, HEART-BROKEN LAND... PALESTINE SITS IN SACKCLOTH AND ASHES. OVER IT BROODS THE SPELL OF A CURSE THAT HAS WITHERED ITS FIELDS AND FETTERED ITS ENERGIES. WHERE SODOM AND GOMORRAH REARED THEIR

DOMES AND TOWERS, THAT SOLEMN SEA NOW FLOODS THE PLAIN, IN WHOSE BITTER WATERS NO LIVING THING EXISTS—OVER WHOSE WAVELESS SURFACE THE BLISTERING AIR HANGS MOTIONLESS AND DEAD—ABOUT WHOSE BORDERS NOTHING GROWS BUT WEEDS, AND SCATTERING TUFTS OF CANE, AND THAT TREACHEROUS FRUIT THAT PROMISES REFRESHMENT TO PARCHING LIPS, BUT TURNS TO ASHES AT THE TOUCH....RENOUNDED JERUSALEM ITSELF, THE STATELIEST NAME IN HISTORY, HAS LOST ALL ITS ANCIENT GRANDEUR, AND IS BECOME A PAUPER VILLAGE; THE RICHES OF SOLOMON ARE NO LONGER THERE TO COMPEL THE ADMIRATION OF VISITING ORIENTAL QUEENS; THE WONDERFUL TEMPLE WHICH WAS THE PRIDE AND THE GLORY OF ISRAEL, IS GONE... PALESTINE IS DESOLATE AND UNLOVELY. AND WHY SHOULD IT BE OTHERWISE? CAN THE CURSE OF THE DEITY BEAUTIFY A LAND?

Notice the glaring differences between the two descriptions of the same land. Why do you think Israel changed so drastically between the time of Josephus and Mark Twain?

What's fascinating to note is that the Torah predicted such a difference:

VAYIKRA 26:32

והשמתי אני את הארץ ושממו עליה איביכם הישבים בה:

I WILL MAKE THE LAND DESOLATE, SO THAT IT WILL BECOME DESOLATE [ALSO] OF YOUR ENEMIES WHO LIVE IN IT.

Rashi explains how the Land being desolate is actually a good thing for Jews:

RASHI

והשמתי אני את הארץ - זו מדה טובה לישראל שלא ימצאו

האויבים נחת רוח בארצם, שתהא שוממה מיושביה:

I WILL MAKE THE LAND DESOLATE: THIS IS ACTUALLY A GOOD

THING FOR ISRAEL, NAMELY THAT SINCE THE LAND WILL BE DESOLATE OF PEOPLE LIVING IN IT, THE ENEMIES WILL NOT FIND CONTENTMENT IN ISRAEL'S LAND [AND WILL HAVE TO LEAVE].

The Maharsha further explains when this is referring to:

MAHARSHA, CHIDDUSHEI AGGADOS, SANHEDRIN 98A

[אין לך קץ מגולה מזה וכו' שנאמר ואתם הרי גו'.] כל זמן שאין ישראל על אדמתם אין הארץ נותנת פירותיה כדרכה אבל כשתחזור ליתן פירותיה זהו קץ מגולה שקרב לבא זמן גאולה שיחזרו ישראל על אדמתן

AS LONG AS ISRAEL DOES NOT DWELL ON ITS LAND, THE LAND DOES NOT GIVE HER FRUITS, AS SHE IS ACCUSTOMED. WHEN SHE WILL BEGIN TO REFLOURISH, HOWEVER, AND GIVE OF HER FRUITS, THIS IS THE CLEAR SIGN THAT THE END – THE TIME OF REDEMPTION – IS APPROACHING, WHEN ALL OF ISRAEL WILL RETURN TO THEIR LAND.

Interesting Fact: Israel was the only country in the world to finish the 20th century with a net gain in trees. According to the Maharsha, the time of the Geulah must be fast approaching indeed.

While Israel is the most lush of lands, it can also be the harshest of lands. When Yidden live in Eretz Yisroel, the land is lush, when they are in golus, it turns into a desert wasteland.

In Likutei Torah (Parshas Shlach), the Alter Rebbe explains the idea of milk and honey that milk represents Chessed/kindness, and honey represents Gevurah/discipline. The emphasis in the posuk is that the milk and honey are flowing. This means that in Israel the channels are open and there is an unrestrained flow of both Chessed and Gevurah. Perhaps this can explain why Israel is a land of extremes. The Alter Rebbe continues and explains that the fact that the Land is blessed with physical blessings is only a manifestation of the divine blessings that are found there.

What is unique about Israel in a spiritual sense?

The Posuk tells us that Hashem always is concerned about the welfare of Eretz Yisroel:

DEVORIM 11:12

אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְקוּם אֱלֹהֶיהָ דְרֹשׁ אֶתְּהָ תָּמִיד עֵינֵי יְקוּם אֱלֹהֶיהָ בָּהּ
מִרְשֵׁית הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרֵית שָׁנָה:

A LAND WHICH HASHEM CARES FOR, THE EYES OF HASHEM ARE ALWAYS UPON IT FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR UNTIL THE END OF THE YEAR.

The Rambam explains that this means that there is more Divine protection in Israel:

RAMBAM, MOREH NEVUCHIM I:44

”תָּמִיד עֵינֵי הַאֱלֹהִים בָּהּ”

”THE EYES OF HASHEM ARE ALWAYS UPON IT,” MEANS THAT HIS PROVIDENCE IS UPON IT.

During the Gulf War in 1991, when scud missiles were falling on Israel and Israel feared the worst, the Rebbe would reiterate this posuk to assure people that Israel is the safest place in the world.

On a more simple level, the posuk is saying that Hashem's presence is found in Israel more than anywhere else. Why is this so? Why is Israel the holiest of lands? How can a land be holy? What does it mean to be holy?

Holiness = Transparency

We need a good definition of the term holiness. What is holiness? While the word קדושה connotes distinction and separateness, to be apart from physical reality and devoted to spirituality, in practice it means something altogether different. To make something holy means to make it transparent to its spiritual purpose.

For example, when a Jew performs a mitzvah, he is connecting with

holiness because makes himself transparent at that moment to his spiritual purpose. Even when he is not actually doing a mitzvah, he is essentially holy simply because he is a Jew. Of course a Jew is more holy when he performs a mitzvah, but without the mitzvah he is also holy, so what is the difference?

There are two reasons why a Jew is holy:

- 1) Because he belongs to Hashem's chosen nation. The fact that Hashem chose him, makes him essentially holy.
- 2) When he performs a mitzvah he is holy because the action of a mitzvah makes him more transparent to his spiritual purpose.

The same two reasons apply to the holiness of Eretz Yisroel:

- 1) Eretz Yisroel is essentially holy because it is Hashem's chosen land.
- 2) As a result of Hashem choosing it, it is also the place that is most transparent to Hashem's presence.

The posuk calls Eretz Yisroel the chosen land:

”הַמְּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בוֹ”

THE PLACE WHICH HASHEM YOUR G-D HAS CHOSEN IT

The Rebbe explains:

LIKUTEI SICHOS VOL. 18 P. 409

בנוגע ארץ ישראל, איר קדושה איז ניט מצד דער קדושה וואס אין איר (אדרבא די קדושה קומט מצד ולאחרי הבחירה), ווארום וויבאלד אז בחירת הקב"ה אין ארץ ישראל איז א בחירה עצמית (כשברא העולם), זי איז נחלת ה'

HASHEM'S CHOICE OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL WAS NOT DUE TO THE HOLINESS THAT IS IN IT (ON THE CONTRARY, THE HOLINESS COMES AS A RESULT OF HASHEM'S CHOICE). SINCE HASHEM'S DECISION TO CHOOSE THE LAND OF ISRAEL WAS A BECHIRAH ATZMIS [AN UNCOMPELLED CHOICE MADE OF HASHEM'S OWN ESSENTIAL POWER OF FREE WILL], THEN THIS IS WHY THE LAND OF ISRAEL IS THE HERITAGE OF HASHEM...

Israel is holy because Hashem chose it to be so, it has an essential and eternal connection with Hashem. This is in contrast to Bavel that is also called holy, but only in reference to the Torah that was studied there. In and of itself it is not a holy land.

In Tanya, the Alter Rebbe compares Hashem's presence in Eretz Yisroel to the presence of the Neshamah in the brain.

TANYA, CH. 51-52

כמו שנשמת האדם היא ממלאה כל רמ"ח אברי הגוף מראשו ועד רגלו ואעפ"כ עיקר משכנה והשראתה היא במוחו ומהמוח מתפשטת לכל האברים...מהשכינה המלובשת בהיכל ק"ק של כל עולם ועולם כללי או פרטי נמשך ומתפשט ממנה אור וחיות לכל העולם והברואים שבו נשמות ומלאכים וכו'

THE ANALOGY IS FROM THE SOUL OF A HUMAN BEING WHICH PERVADES ALL THE 248 ORGANS OF THE BODY, FROM HEAD TO FOOT, YET ITS PRINCIPAL HABITATION AND ABODE IS IN HIS BRAIN, WHENCE IT IS DIFFUSED THROUGHOUT ALL THE ORGANS...IT IS FROM THE SHECHINAH WHICH IS CLOTHED IN THE SHRINE OF THE HOLY OF HOLIES OF EACH AND EVERY GENERAL OR PARTICULAR WORLD THAT LIGHT AND VITALITY ARE EXTENDED AND DIFFUSED TO THE WHOLE WORLD AND THE CREATURES CONTAINED THEREIN, THE SOULS, ANGELS, AND SO FORTH

Just as the Neshamah gives life and is expressed throughout the body, it enters the body, and its primary residence is in the brain. From there it provides life to the entire body. Similarly, the place of the Kodesh Hakadashim is the point of entry for the Divine power that creates and gives life to all of existence. It is also the place where it [the Shechinah] dwells.

BEREISHIS RABBA 59

”ירושלים אורו של עולם, שנאמר (ישעיה ס) 'והלכו גויים לאורך', ומי הוא אורה של ירושלים? הקב"ה. דכתוב: 'והיה לך ה'

לאור עולם

YERUSHALAYIM IS THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD, AS [THE POSUK] SAYS “AND THE NATIONS WILL FOLLOW YOUR LIGHT,” AND WHO IS THE LIGHT OF YERUSHALAYIM? HASHEM. AS [THE POSUK] SAYS “AND HASHEM WILL BE FOR YOU AS AN EVERLASTING LIGHT.”

Because of this extra kedushah that exists in Eretz Yisroel, there are many mitzvos that only apply in Israel. Some of these mitzvos include Shemita (leaving the fields to rest in the seventh year), terumah and maaser (produce can not be eaten until portions are given to the Kohen, Levi, poor etc.), as well as other agricultural mitzvos. Chazal say that Moshe Rabeinu davened to enter Eretz Yisroel only so he could merit to keep these Mitzvos.

The extra degree of kedusha also explains why Chazal say that the air of Eretz Yisroel itself makes people wiser. This is also true of spiritual sensitivity, since there can only be prophecy when the Yidden are in Eretz Yisroel or if the prophecy is about Eretz Yisroel (nevuah is a heightened, and very articulate state of spiritual sensitivity). As the Ramban learns from the posuk:

RAMBAN, DEVARIM 18:15

**נביא מקרבך מאחיך כמני - טעם "מקרבך", לרמוז שאין נבואה
... אלא בארץ ישראל**

“A PROPHET FROM YOUR MIDST, FROM YOUR BRETHREN, LIKE ME [MOSHE] SHALL THE HASHEM, YOUR G-D, ESTABLISH FOR YOU” – THE PHRASE “FROM YOUR MIDST” HINTS THAT PROPHECY ONLY EXISTS IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL.

There is a certain kedusha that a Jew can only attain in Eretz Yisrael. In the Kuzari the sage explains to the king that the soul can achieve a greater level of perfection in Eretz Yisroel.

The Kuzari is a book written by Rabbi Yehudah Halevi that describes a theoretical discussion between a sage and the king of the Khazars (a kingdom from the latter part of the first millenium that converted to Judaism).

RABBI YEHUDAH HALEVI, THE KUZARI

אמר הכוזרי: מאמרך ובארצו קשה לי לקבלו.

אמר החבר: אל יקשה בעיניך שתתיחד ארץ בדבר מכל הארצות, ואתה רואה מקום שמצליח בו צמח מבלתי צמח, ומוצא מבלעדי מוצא, וחיה מבלעדי חיה, ומתיחדים יושביו בצורות ומדות מבלעדי זולתם במצווע המזג. והנה עפ"י המזג תהיה שלמות הנפש וחסרונה.

THE KING: [THE IDEA THAT HASHEM'S GLORY NEEDS] TO OCCUR IN HIS LAND -- I FIND IT DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT.

THE SAGE: DO NOT BE SURPRISED BY THE FACT THAT ONE COUNTRY HAS AN ADVANTAGE OVER OTHER COUNTRIES. THIS IS BECAUSE WE FIND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COUNTRIES WITH RESPECT TO THEIR VEGETATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES.

THERE ARE PLANTS THAT CAN BE GROWN IN ONE LAND, BUT DO NOT GROW IN ANOTHER. THERE IS A LAND IN WHICH THERE LIVE CERTAIN ANIMALS WHICH DO NOT LIVE IN ANY OTHER LAND, AND THERE IS A LAND RICH IN NATURAL RESOURCES AND ANOTHER IN WHICH THESE ARE SCARCE. THERE IS A DIFFERENCE [BETWEEN] ONE COUNTRY [AND] ANOTHER WITH RESPECT TO THE ATTRIBUTES AND NATURE OF THEIR INHABITANTS. AND [BEING THAT] THE PERFECTION OF THE SOUL OR THE OPPOSITE OF THIS PERFECTION DEPEND ON THE SUBSTANCES OF WHICH THE PERSON IS COMPOSED [IT SHOULD NOT COME A SURPRISE THAT A GREATER PERFECTION OF THE SOUL WILL BE FOUND IN ONE LAND RATHER THAN ANOTHER].

Until now, we've discussed what is special about Eretz Yisroel. We see in the Kuzari that Eretz Yisroel is a special place for our souls to

connect with Hashem and achieve their perfection. What we still need to understand is what makes Israel ours?

Why does Eretz Yisroel belong to us?

Eretz Yisroel is the land Hashem promised to our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchok, and Yaakov. Hashem sent Avraham from his hometown in Ur Kasdim (Ur of the Chaldes) to Eretz Yisroel, "to the land which I will show you." Hashem promised to give the land to Avraham's descendants as an everlasting inheritance (that means that it's ours forever). Yitzchok was commanded to remain in the land and never leave it. When Yaakov went down to Mitzraim he was promised that his children would return to the land.

Rashi quotes the opinion that entire story of Bereishis is only included in the Torah to set the facts straight that Hashem created the world and gave Israel to the Jews:

RASHI, BEREISHIS 1:1

אמר רבי יצחק לא היה צריך להתחיל את התורה אלא מהחודש הזה לכם, שהיא מצוה ראשונה שנצטוו בה ישראל, ומה טעם פתח בבראשית, משום כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו לתת להם נחלת גוים

RABBI YITZCHOK SAID: THE TORAH ONLY HAD TO START FROM "THIS MONTH SHALL BE FOR YOU [THE BEGINNING OF THE MONTHS]," [I.E. THE MITZVAH OF KIDUSH HACHODESH] WHICH IS THE FIRST MITZVAH THAT WAS INSTRUCTED TO THE JEWS, WHY DID [THE TORAH] BEGIN WITH BEREISHIS [I.E. CREATION]? SO THAT "THE POWER OF HIS ACTIONS HE TOLD TO HIS PEOPLE TO GIVE THEM THE INHERITANCE OF THE GOYIM"

The entire book of Bereishis is there to teach us that Hashem created the world, so when the goyim contest our right to the Land of Israel, we will be able to tell them "Hashem, the creator of the world gave Israel to us, if you have issues with that, go take it up with Him"

Notice it says he told "his people" not "the goyim," the point of Bereishis is to make us firm in our belief that Hashem created the world. Then we will have the force and conviction needed to stand up confidently and defend our claim to the land.

The mitzvah to live in Israel.

If Israel is ours, shouldn't we all be living there? Is there a mitzvah to live in Israel? If there is, what's our excuse for not packing our bags and catching the next plane?

While the Rambam doesn't count living in Israel as one of the 613 mitzvos, the Ramban, in his list of mitzvos that the Rambam left out, counts living in Israel as the fourth of the positive commandments:

RAMBAN (FOURTH POSITIVE MITZVAH IN THE OMISSIONS OF THE RAMBAM IN SEFER HAMITZVOS)

מצוה רביעית שנצטוינו לרשת הארץ אשר נתן האל יתברך ויתעלה לאבותינו לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב ולא נעזבה ביד זולתינו מן האומות או לשממה. והוא אמרו להם (מסעי לג) והורשתם את הארץ וישבתם בה כי לכם נתתי את הארץ לרשת אותה...היא מצות עשה לדורות מתחייב כל יחיד ממנו ואפילו בזמן גלות...אמרו ישיבת ארץ ישראל שקולה כנגד כל המצות שבתורה:

THE FOURTH MITZVAH THAT WE ARE COMMANDED IS TO INHERIT THE LAND THAT HASHEM GAVE TO OUR FOREFATHERS AVRAHAM, YITZCHOK, AND YAAKOV AND NOT TO LEAVE IT TO ANY OTHER NATIONS OR TO REMAIN DESOLATE. THIS IS WHAT [MOSHE] INSTRUCTED THEM "YOU SHOULD INHERIT THE LAND AND SETTLE IN IT FOR THE LAND WAS GIVEN TO YOU TO INHERIT... IT IS A POSITIVE COMMANDMENT THAT OBLIGATES EVERY SINGLE INDIVIDUAL AND IS APPLICABLE THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS, EVEN DURING GOLUS...OUR SAGES SAID: SETTLING THE LAND OF ISRAEL IS EQUIVALENT TO ALL THE MITZVOS IN THE TORAH.

So if there is a mitzvah, aren't we obligated to pack up our belongings and catch the next flight there?

There is much discussion as to why the Rambam didn't count living in Israel as a mitzvah. Some maintain that the Rambam doesn't hold it is a mitzvah, others say it is only a rabbinic mitzvah, a mitzvah d'rabonon (which would still be binding). The Megilas Esther (a commentary on the Rambam's Sefer Hamitzvos) maintains that according to the Rambam it is not a mitzvah at all! The Minchas Elazar (the Munkatcher Rebbe) ruled that we follow the explanation of the Megilas Esther.

The Avnei Nezer (the Sochatchover Rebbe) was asked in the 1860s why gedolei yisroel in Europe didn't fulfill the mitzvah of moving to Israel. After a long pilpul he concludes with the following opinion (based on the Ritva):

AVNEI NEZER Y"D 454

שו"ת אבני נזר חלק יורה דעה סימן תנד
נראה דאין חיוב בזה"ז לעלות רק על יושבי א"י החיוב שלא
לצאת ממנה.

NOWADAYS THERE IS NO OBLIGATION TO MOVE TO ISRAEL, ONLY FOR SETTLERS IN ISRAEL NOT TO LEAVE.

This would explain why the Rebbe rejected the many requests to come visit Israel, explaining that if he would come visit, he wouldn't be allowed to leave. There are only three reasons why a person may be allowed to leave Israel. 1) To learn Torah 2) To marry 3) To make a parnasah.

The Lubavitch approach to moving to Israel can be understood from the following famous episode:

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ווי ס'איז ידוע דער ענטפער פון דעם צמח צדק, וואס ער האט
געזאגט א אידן אויף יחידות, "ווילסט פארן קיין ארץ ישראל?
-- מאך דא ארץ ישראל!" ער זאל דא אין חוץ לארץ מאכן א

דירה לו יתברך

THERE IS A WELL KNOWN ANSWER OF THE TZEMACH TZEDEK TOLD TO A JEW IN YECHIDUS: "IF YOU WANT TO TRAVEL TO ISRAEL, MAKE ISRAEL HERE!" THAT HE SHOULD MAKE A DWELLING PLACE FOR HASHEM HERE IN THE DIASPORA.

The uniqueness of Eretz Yisroel can be found everywhere. When Moshiach comes, the holiness found in Eretz Yisroel will extend to the entire world, as the Midrash notes:

SIFREI, BEG. OF DEVARIM

עתידה ארץ ישראל שתתפשט בכל הארצות

THE LAND OF ISRAEL IS DESTINED TO SPREAD TO ALL THE LANDS

According to Chassidus, this is accomplished through our actions. When we do a mitzvah, we uncover the latent G-dliness that resides within the object we performed the mitzvah with as well as the place where the mitzvah is performed. This is the spark of Eretz Yisroel that is in every person in every thing, and in every place. Thus, by doing mitzvos we transform our environment into an Eretz Yisroel, a place where Hashem's presence is found. When we complete our mission and reveal Hashem's presence throughout the world, then, Moshiach will come and bring us all back home (to Israel proper).

Concluding Question:

Based on what you have learned, what are three unique qualities of the land of Israel?

Key Points

- As Jews, Israel is in our hearts and prayers
- Israel is a strategically located land flowing with blessings
- Hashem made it depend on rain so we will pray to Him for it
- It is desolate when abandoned and yet flourishes when inhabited
- Why it's holy: 1. Chosen by Hashem 2. It's the brain of the universe
- It's ours because its creator gave it to us
- There's an obligation to live there, but only if you are already there
- We can transform wherever we are into Israel by doing Mitzvos

