



JUDAISM FOR LIVING SERIES

THE PURPOSE OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

SOURCE SHEET AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



We all understand that Israel plays a pivotal role in our identity as Jews. It's the land promised to us by G-d, imagined as a safe-haven for Jews escaping antisemitism, a place where we feel most "Jewish," and connected to G-d and spirituality.

Let's take a closer look at what connects the Jew to Israel:

The Land of Israel as a Place to Fulfill the Torah

Many commandments of the Torah, in particular those related to agriculture and to the Jewish kingship, can only be fulfilled while living in the Land of Israel.

Q: However, did you know that living in the land of Israel is according to many authorities a biblical commandment?

SOURCE 1: *Devarim (Deuteronomy) Mitzvah to Live in Land of Israel*

"For you are crossing the Jordan river to come and possess the land that Hashem, your G-d, gives to you;
you shall possess it and settle in it." (Devarim 11:31)

כִּי אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן לְבֹא לְרִשְׁתָּ אֶת־
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם נֹתֵן לָכֶם וִירְשֶׁתֶם
אֹתָהּ וַיִּשְׁבְּתֶם־בָּהּ:

"You shall be careful to **perform all the decrees and the ordinances** that I present to you today" (Devarim 11:32)

וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם לַעֲשׂוֹת אֵת כָּל־הַחֻקִּים וְאֵת־
הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לִפְנֵיכֶם הַיּוֹם:

We see from verse 31 above that there is a biblical mitzvah (commandment) to live in the land of Israel. But it goes farther than that. In verse 32 above we are tasked with being very careful about performing the mitzvot (commandments) of the Torah.

Q: Why do you think these two verses are presented side by side? Do you think there is a connection being made between performing mitzvot (commandments) and living in the land of Israel?

According to many authorities there is a positive mitzvah to live in the Holy Land, where one is able to achieve a closer connection with God, precisely because in the Land we are able to fulfill His commandments at the highest level.

In fact, Nachmanides an early and extremely credible Rabbinic sage takes this once step farther:

SOURCE 2: *Nachmanides (Ramban), Vayikra 18:25 – Performance of the outside the Land of Israel is only a “rehearsal” for their performance in the Land.*

The Sages stated in the Sifri: “[If your hearts lead you astray and you serve and bow to other gods] and you will quickly be banished [from the good land that God gives you]” (Devarim 11:17): Even though I [God] **am exiling you from the Land of Israel, you should still perform so that when you return they will not be new and unfamiliar to you.**

אמרו בספרי (עקב מג), ואבדתם מהרה (דברים יא יז), אף על פי שאני מגלה אתכם מן הארץ לחוצה לארץ היו מצויינין במצות שבשתחזרו לא יהו עליכם חדשים

Q: Why do you think are so important in a general sense, and even more central in the land of Israel?

SOURCE 3: *Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene, Set in Stone, p.31, Targum – Each mitzvah we fulfill intrinsically connects us with God.*

Judaism is not as much a religion as it is a relationship. It is only through mitzvah observance that man can build a deep, enduring, and meaningful relationship with God ...

That a mitzvah is the very process of forging the bond [with God] is contained within the very word **מצוה**, “**commandment**,” closely related to the word **צוותא**, meaning a **connection or a binding**.

Certainly, one can connect to G-d through outside of Israel. But Israel offers a broader and deeper relationship.

Q: Why do you think this is so?

Israel is like litmus paper for the Jewish soul; With each mitzvah a different aspect of the Jew comes alive and is deeply attached to his/her Creator. Practically, more are applicable in Israel than anywhere else, G-d’s presence (as we described in a prior class) is more palpable there, we have the potential to collectively focus our lives around Torah and in Israel, and there are less foreign influences to distract us from this lifestyle.

This is why we feel so spiritual and close to G-d in the Holy Land in the midst of Jews doing Jewish things, even though we are all, not yet on the same page. Imagine what it will feel like when we are?!

It’s no wonder that the Torah testifies that were given by G-d to “benefit us”!:

SOURCE 4: *Devarim 6:24 – God gave us the Torah for our own good.*

God commanded us to perform all these decrees, to fear God our Lord, for our own good for all time, to give us life as this very day.

ויצונו ה' לעשות את כל החקים האלה ליראה את יקוק אלקינו לטוב לנו כל הימים לחיתנו כהיום הזה

With this source we understand why the Torah can testify that all the are solely for our good. What greater good is there than a direct attachment to G-d?

But, let’s look more closely at the source. The source describes as “for our own good” “for all time,” then one phrase later, “to give us life as this very day.” Doesn’t for all time include “this very day”?

Q: What does the Torah emphasize by stating, to give us life, “as this very day”?

Perhaps it is to underscore the concept that are not just a way to get you into Heaven (for all time), but they benefit us in the here and now. (this very day!)

The Land of Israel as a Model Society for the World

SOURCE 5: *Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Bereishis 48:3-4 –
Individuals in Jewish society will play different roles, but all are bound
by a common “spiritual and moral mission.”*

The Jewish nation is to represent agriculture as well as commerce, militarism as well as culture and learning. The Jewish people will be a nation of farmers, a nation of businessmen, a nation of soldiers and a nation of science. Thereby, as a model nation, to establish the truth that the one great personal and national task which God revealed in His Torah is not dependent on any particular kind of talent or character trait, but that the whole of humanity in all its shades of diversity can equally find its calling in one common spiritual and moral mission and outlook in life.

Perhaps we can further suggest, that the 12 tribes of Israel with their various talents and inherited regions throughout the land of Israel (think of a State for each tribe), each with their own unique natural attributes, all combine to create the perfect mosaic which is “Israel” - Not just the Nation but the Ideal.

The sometimes-unfair critique by the nations of the world, in a perverse way, calls us to this higher purpose:

SOURCE 6: *Gateway to Judaism Rabbi Mordechai Becher –
Expectations of a higher standard.*

The tremendous media scrutiny of Israel and the extraordinary amount of attention paid to this tiny country in the Middle East may well be due to the fact that, deep down, people expect something more of Israel and the Jews. There is a sense that the State of Israel should have higher standards than its neighbors and the rest of the world – and indeed it should. This idea is beautifully expressed in the following verses in the Book of Yeshayahu/Isaiah (2:3):

“And many nations will go and say, ‘Let us go and ascend to the mountain of God, to the Temple of the God of Jacob; and we will be instructed in His ways, and we will walk in His paths’; for from Zion shall come forth the Torah, and the word of God from Jerusalem.”

Israel is supposed to be the place to which the people of the world look for guidance in moral behavior.

Israel is both a real land where the Jew finds his fulfillment and an ideal which calls the Jewish People and Humanity to perfection. Though we can be Jewish and achieve a connection to G-d anywhere in the world, all would agree that Israel stands head and shoulders apart as a means to fulfilling our special Jewish Destiny.

UPPING OUR GAME: LOVING OUR FELLOW JEWS

We are one family and must recommit to appreciating and loving our fellow Jews, particularly now when Israel is under direct attack and Jews are under duress throughout the world. The Torah’s command to love Jews is phrased, Love your neighbor “like yourself.” What does “like yourself” come to add to this directive? Consider the poignant words of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler:

SOURCE 7: RABBI ELIJAHU DESSLER ESSAY ON KINDNESS

“...By giving to him of yourself, you will find in your soul that you and he are indeed one; you will feel in the clearest possible way that he really is you, “as yourself.”

All Jews are one. When you attack one of us you attack all of us. We are one body and must collectively “fight back” and do whatever we can to support our brothers and sisters in Israel, both physically and spiritually. May our learning, good deeds and prayers be a merit for their safety and ultimate salvation.