

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



There's No Place Like Home

Yom HaAtzma'ut

No matter what Torah reading will be chanted in your shul this Shabbat, either K'doshim in the Diaspora, or Emor, here in the Holy Land; Eretz Yisrael features prominently. In K'doshim, we have 'when you reap in your land (Vayikra 19:9) and 'you shall faithfully observe all My laws lest the land spit you out' (20:22). In Emor, there is, 'When you enter the land that I am giving you and you reap, bring the first sheaf to the kohein' (23:10), and 'When you reap in your land, you shall not reap the edges' (v. 22). This shouldn't be surprising, because the book of Vayikra is basically two books.

The first half (chapters 1-17) is really Torat Kohanim, discussing the Mishkan and the duties of the kohanim. The second half (chapters 18-27) should be called Torat Eretz Yisrael. It contains many mitzvot describing a holy or meaningful life, many of these mitzvot are triggered by living in Eretz Yisrael or are connected to the Land. Living in Israel is conditioned upon living a moral life. Towards the end of the

book (chapter 26) we have the TOCHACHA, the curses, which are a result of not keeping SH'MITA (the land shall make up for its sabbaths or SH'MITOT during its desolation, 26:34).

The denouement of the TOCHACHA gives hope: Then will I remember My covenant with Yaakov; I will remember also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham; and I will remember the land (26:42). God tells us not to lose hope no matter how dire our condition may be, because God will never renege on the solemn oaths made to our Patriarchs. But God also claims to have made a commitment to the Land. What is the nature of this deal?

Rav Soloveitchik described this verse a little bit differently than most commentaries. He didn't think that this verse is to comfort us, as much as to warn us that we will never be able to avoid our Jewishness. He claimed: It will not avail you, in spite of all, to forget the ancient covenant. I will bring about something new that will always remind you of your Jewishness, that will exemplify the fact that you are different. I, God, will remember the patriarchal covenant so that you will be forced to remember it... The shadow of Avraham our

father will pursue you. Do you know how? By Eretz Yisrael - and I will remember the Land.

When our verse declares that God will never forget the Land, it isn't because of a promise to the Land. It is because of the commitment to the Jews. The Rav doesn't believe in a direct relationship between God and this inanimate entity, Eretz Yisrael. The importance of the Land, to the Rav, is as a constant reminder of the Jews' relationship to the covenant. The modern Medina is a wakeup call to both Jew and Gentile that in spite of history's treatment of the Jew, God will never abandon us, and the State of Israel is the proof of that unbreakable bond between God and the Chosen People.

Rav Kook took a diametrically opposite approach to the importance and sanctity of Eretz Yisrael. He wrote: Eretz Yisrael is not a peripheral matter, an external acquisition of the nation; it is not merely a means toward the goal of the general coalescing of the nation, nor of strengthening its material existence, nor even its spiritual. Eretz Yisrael is an independent unit, bound with a living attachment with the nation, bound with inner Segulot (spiritual powers) with the nation's existence... For instance, our connection to Eretz Yisrael is not dependent on history.

Eretz Yisrael was given to Avraham Avinu without previous historical connection. The bond between Avraham and the land was not based on any external reason. The B'RIT between Avraham and the Land was Divine. Only in the Holy Land can the national life of the Chosen People be totally uplifted to G-d. The prophecy exclusive to the Land of Israel, the mitzvot unique to the land, and the Beit HaMikdash are all manifestations of this Divine connection. It is an attachment based on Ru'ach HaKodesh, beyond scientific inquiry and rational explanation.

On the other hand, Rav Soloveitchik believes that Avraham chose the Land, and history is the one and only catalyst for the special place of Eretz Yisrael in our Tradition.

However, it makes no difference the source and nature of the relationship between Jew and the Land. The bottom line is that in the present reality, Eretz Yisrael and Am Yisrael are inseparable. Which brings us to Yom HaAtzma'ut. This anniversary of the proclamation of the Medina represents an opportunity to show our profound gratitude for having a land of our own. As a religious Zionist, I, of course, believe that this includes SHEVACH and HODA'AH to God, Who controls our destiny and

guards our covenantal relationship.

According to Rav Soloveitchik's grandson, Rav Moshe Lichtenstein, this opportunity allows us to show gratitude for more than the events of 74 years ago. He adds: the selfless devotion of the population in Eretz Yisrael who fought for the Land and thereby reinstated the covenant whose validity had been challenged by secularization and persecution. Just as the Jews of Shushan and Modi'in renewed their commitment to the B'RIT, so did a similar renewal occur throughout the Land of Israel when the Jewish State was declared. Its significance, then, extends beyond the specific achievement of establishing a national entity in the land of our fathers. Its significance stems from the reinstating of the covenant of the patriarchs in the modern world. We might add that even in the Diaspora, the establishment of the State of Israel brought about a revival of Jewish identity or, in other words, a revival of the B'RIT AVOT.

Of course, Yom Ha'Atzmaut is about the birth of Medinat Yisrael, but it's also about the eternal triad of God, Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael. BTW this point of view helps us see the relevance of the mitzvot at the end of Sefer Vayikra, too. 