

# Let's Talk About Eretz Yisroel

THROUGH THE LENS OF THE REBBE'S TORAH

PART 1:  
**Ownership**

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לע"נ  
הרה"ח הרה"ת ר' שמעון בהר"ר  
שמואל זאנוויל הי"ד גאלדמאן  
נלב"ע כ"ט תשרי ה'תשע"ז  
ולע"נ זוגתו מרת אסתר בת הרה"ח  
ר' יוחנן ע"ה נלב"ע ט"ב תשרי ה'תשע"ד  
ולע"נ ר' יצחק יעקב ב"ר משה ע"ה סיימאן  
נלב"ע ד' אדר א' ה'תשע"ט

**W**hy are we having a conversation about Eretz Yisroel? Certainly, as Yidden, we care deeply for the millions of our brothers and sisters living there. The success of the government and security forces there is crucial to ensuring their security and prosperity and the impact on Yidden everywhere is also obvious.

Yet many would argue that we know too little to formulate educated opinions on the problems challenging Israeli society today. We should say Tehillim, give extra Tzedaka, strengthen our efforts in the mitvzoim the Rebbe launched specifically in connection with the security of Eretz Yisroel, and stay out of politics, they say. Besides, our opinions don't matter, and discussing these issues is, at best, a waste of time.

While this perspective is understandable, it's flawed. Every Yid must care about the situation in Eretz Yisroel, formulate an educated opinion based on Torah principles, and get involved whenever and however possible.

That's right. Judaism does not recognize the idea of individuals making up their own opinions based on their personal feelings and perspectives or whatever worldview happens to be popular at the moment. We were given a Torah, the divine blueprint for the universe that is eternally true, applicable, and binding. While there may be differences of opinion as how to understand and apply the Torah to any given situation, the basic principles remain the same.

The fact that the Rebbe spoke publicly – for hundreds of hours – about the security of the Yidden in Eretz Yisroel is a profound lesson for all of us. Certainly, the Rebbe intended for his messages to reach the right people in positions of power to influence certain outcomes. But choosing to communicate these messages in public, at farbrengens, implies that there is a purpose in the “people on the street” knowing about these matters as well. Not just because in a democracy the masses control their leadership at the ballot box. Even Yidden with no voting rights in Israel should understand these issues.

These were not simply declarations of policies the Israeli government ought to adopt or protestations of bad decisions with deadly consequences. The Rebbe delved deeply into the Torah principles from which he derived his positions, and

shared them with Klal Yisroel at great length. Because the issues at stake in this conversation go to the core of what it means to be a Yid in a historically hostile world. Knowing the truth and sharing it with all Jews and the world is crucial to preserving our nation, and our relationship with our land, and ultimately achieving a *dira b'tachtonim* through Moshiach.

In this new column, we will present the Torah principles explained and clarified in the Rebbe's many sichos and letters regarding the security of Eretz Yisroel and highlight their eternal relevance.



Most conversations about Eretz Yisroel have the strange dynamic that Yidden are always on the defensive. If you dig beneath the surface, every challenge boils down to the same question: why are you there in the first place?

It's a good question. After all, the casual observer with a peripheral knowledge of world history will claim that although it was a Jewish homeland for many years, that ended close to two thousand years ago.

Let's ask a more important question: What creates ownership? If a family lands on a deserted island, builds a home, and plants a garden, does the island belong to them? Perhaps.

When dealing with private property the answer is typically straightforward. At some point, the property or home was legally owned by someone (however that was established), and the transfer of ownership occurs by legally recognized means, like a sale or gift.

The question is more complicated when dealing with collective ownership. How do nations own the land they inhabit? Many nations, including the United States, acquired their territories by conquest. Does this make it theirs?

The ownership of territory by countries is generally the realm of politics and statesmanship. When it comes to Eretz Yisroel, however, we are dealing with factors that are far beyond treaties and agreements between humans, as strong as they might be.

The United States was established in North America by Europeans who began settling the land 300 years earlier. There were natives here before then, and there were wars between them and the newcomers. Nevertheless, today it is an accepted fact that the government of the United States of America, declared a nation in 1776, is the legitimate owner

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of the vast landmass between Canada and Mexico. Even if there are some pockets of land in dispute, surely a claim to return the property of the White House to the natives is an absurdity that would never hold weight in a court of law, or even in the court of public opinion. That's the way it is.

In the same vein, arguing that the stretch of land between the Sinai Desert and Syria should be an autonomous Jewish homeland today since there was an autonomous Jewish homeland there two thousand years ago is simply strange.

For over 75 years, people operating in official capacities have formulated other answers to this simple question.

In 1947, the United Nations voted to designate certain parts of the land for the establishment of a Jewish state. The Jews didn't steal it from anyone, they argue; it was done with the world's permission.

Firstly, what right did the 140 nations represented in that august body have to vote on such a decision? And if your claim to the land is the permission granted by the United Nations, what's stopping them from holding another vote and granting it to someone else? Besides, it's no secret the United Nations makes plenty of silly decisions and takes biased votes against Israel, and we rightfully ignore the vitriol constantly emanating from that organization. So claiming legitimacy to

Eretz Yisroel based on the UN vote is a non-starter.

Others go back to the Balfour Declaration of 1917. In a famous letter to Lord Rothschild, Britain's Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour wrote: "His Majesty's Government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." Before using this as the legitimacy for Jewish autonomy in Eretz Yisroel, remember this letter was written in the context of European colonialism, the merits of which are in and of itself questionable. Who gave the King of England the right to decide the future of the land? And if Mr. Balfour's stroke of a pen can determine the destiny of this stretch of land, then some other bigwig can change its destiny by stroking another pen. It's a bad claim.

The fact that Jewish philanthropists legally purchased large properties in Eretz Yisroel, and established cities, towns, and agricultural communes for many decades – while true – is a weak claim for Israel's legitimacy. The village of Kfar Chabad, for example, was never purchased from anyone, as is the case with more than half of current-day Israel, and considering it stolen ground is absurd.

There is the concept of the "Right to Conquest." Wars have consequences and when one country conquers areas of land from other countries has been considered historically a legal form of acquisition. However, the international community officially stopped recognizing this around 1950.

This leaves us with the burning question: What right do we have to Eretz Yisroel?



Our claim to Eretz Yisroel rests on a simple and eternal fact. Hashem gave it to us.

In Parshas Lech Lecha (13:15) we learn that after Lot's departure, Hashem said to Avraham:

כי את כל הארץ אשר אתה ראה לך אתגננה ולזרעך עד עולם... קום התהלך בארץ לארכה ולרחבה כי לך אתגננה.

*"All the land which you see, to you will I give it, and to your children forever... Arise, walk through the land in its length and its breadth; for I will give it to you."*

At the *Bris Bein Habesarim*, Hashem (15:18) reiterated this promise with an expression emphasizing the transfer of ownership *had already taken place* because Hashem's word has the force of action.

לזרעך נתתי את הארץ הזאת.

*"To your seed I have given this land."*

Lest one claim that this gift was meant for all of Avraham's descendants, we learn in Parshas Toldos (26:3) that Hashem repeated this promise to Yitzchok.

גור בארץ הזאת... כי לך ולזרעך אתן את כל הארצות האלה והקמתי את השבועה אשר נשבעתי לאברהם אביך.

*"Live in this land... for to you, and to your children, I will give all these lands, and I will fulfill the oath which I swore to Avraham your father."*

To clarify that the land was given specifically to Bnei Yisroel and not to the descendants of Eisav, Hashem repeated this promise to Yaakov in Parshas Vayeitzei (28:13).

הארץ אשר אתה שכב עליה לך אתגננה ולזרעך.

*"The land on which you lie, to you I will give it and to your children."*

Even before Bnei Yisroel began conquering Eretz Kena'an under Yehoshua's leadership in the year 2488, it rightfully belonged to them due to Hashem's vow. Even before it had become sanctified with the many mitzvos associated with it, *ownership* of the land had been transferred to the children of the three *Avos*.

Just as our ownership of the land predated our arrival in the land, it continues after we were exiled. There is no expiration date to this promise. In the *Tochacha* Hashem declares we will be exiled from our land – but continues referring to it as *our land*. No exile can change that.

והיתה ארצכם שממה ועריכם יהיו חרבה.

**"Your land** will be desolate, and **your cities** will be laid waste."

Our objective and enduring claim to Eretz Yisroel is Hashem's promise to the *Avos* repeated numerous times in Torah. All other claims, while technically true, are unhelpful and perhaps even harmful to the cause.

#### NEXT MONTH:

Why is it important for Jews to know and internalize this specific claim to Eretz Yisroel?

**Primary Sources:** Purim 5730 Likkutei Sichos vol. 21 page 404, Yud Alef Nissan 5736 Sichos Kodesh vol 2 page 53-61, Chof Av 5738 Sichos Kodesh vol 3 page 276, Daas Torah (Wolpo) chapter 2.