

# Let's Talk About Eretz Yisroel

THROUGH THE LENS OF THE REBBE'S TORAH

PART 2:  
**Morale**

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Last month we explored the various factors that justify Jewish sovereignty in the territory between Egypt, Jordan and Syria. We concluded that our most logically valid and enduring claim is that this swath of land, known as Eretz Yisroel, was given to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov as an inheritance for their descendants—for eternity. While this is true, we need to appreciate why the knowledge of this claim is crucial for all Yidden to know and live with.

Many Yidden living in Eretz Yisroel wonder why they are living there. It is a tiny country surrounded by over a dozen nations with hundreds of millions of people who seek its destruction. For close to eighty years its neighbors have attacked it repeatedly with deadly force and the worst of intentions, and have failed due to Hashem's kindness and tremendous miracles.

Why bother investing the effort and resources to develop a country so threatened, they wonder. Why should we put our children through the difficulties of serving in an army constantly engaged in battles on multiple fronts? Even if one can make a good living and raise a healthy family here, life without peace is no life. It would be better to live anywhere else in the world without the threat of violence and death so close to home.

## The Crux of the Issue

The problem runs deeper than issues of security. Some wonder whether living in Eretz Yisroel is justified in the first place. If our grandparents came to this land as pioneers in the 1800s and eventually displaced some locals, was that just? Rashi, the eternal Torah teacher of every Jewish child, addresses this dilemma at the beginning of his commentary on Chumash, banishing the basis for self-doubt.

On the first possuk of Bereishis, Rashi asks why the Torah, a guide to how we should act, begins with the story of creation and not with the first Mitzvah, *Kiddush Hachodesh*. The answer:

משום כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו לתת להם נחלת גוים (תהילים קי"א). שאם יאמרו אמות העולם לישראל לסטים אתם, שכבשתם ארצות שבעה גוים, הם אומרים להם כל הארץ של הקדוש ברוך הוא היא, הוא בראה ונתנה לאשר ישר בעיניו, ברצונו נתנה להם, וברצונו נטלה מהם ונתנה לנו:

*"Because [as it states in Tehillim 111:6] 'The strength of His works He related to His people, to give them the inheritance of the nations.' For if the nations of the world should say to the Jews, 'You are robbers, for you conquered by force the lands of the seven nations of Canaan,' they will reply, 'The entire Earth*

*belongs to the Hashem; He created it and gave it to whomever He deemed proper. When He wished, He gave it to them, and when He wished, He took it from them and gave it to us.”*

Considering that Rashi’s commentary is geared toward the “five-year-old chumash student” (as Rashi declares early in his commentary) and every question, answer and interpretation must be relevant to the child’s life experience, why is the justification for Jewish ownership of Eretz Yisroel such a priority?

Five-year-olds in medieval France were probably not engaged in geopolitical debates with non-Jews about a distant land over which Jews had lost sovereignty a thousand years earlier. But they all knew about Eretz Yisroel, and that despite the lengthy exile we still considered it our land, which presents the child with a moral dilemma. Other people currently live there, and other people certainly lived there before Avraham Avinu appeared. What justification did we have to take it from the Kenaanim in the year 2488 and what claim do we have to it today?

No one wants to be a crook, and especially descendants of Avraham Avinu—renowned for his dedication to justice—want to do what’s right. Perhaps we can be Jews without constantly laying claim to this land with all of the moral baggage such a claim entails. Let’s develop a homeland somewhere else without bothering the current residents.

Rashi therefore sets the record straight on this foundational issue that every Jew must understand from the first day he or she learns Torah. Eretz Yisroel is not just our homeland. Our connection to it is not defined just by our current presence there and not just by our 3,000 years of being there. Eretz Yisroel is a vital component of the everlasting covenant between Hashem and the Jewish nation.

The land originally called Eretz Kenaan was transferred to the Jewish nation by the will of the Creator and became Eretz Yisroel.

Acknowledging that others were there before us and that our claim to the land is by divine mandate and covenant is the true way to appreciate that Eretz Yisroel was never stolen from anyone; we should never apologize for having it.

## Eretz Yisroel or Medinat Yisroel

Names matter. By calling the land its traditional age-old name “Eretz Yisroel” we proclaim that our connection to it is by virtue of Hashem’s gift and not due to a UN vote or a document signed by Lord Balfour in 1917. In fact, other claims *weaken* our connection to the land!

Without this awareness the struggle for the land becomes meaningless and we lose morale. Even after winning wars, the guilty conscience of well-meaning people dedicated to “justice” compelled them to rush to return conquered land to our mortal enemies as soon as a ceasefire commenced—even though such an offer endangered millions of Jews.

This does not only impact the Jews living in Eretz Yisroel but also the Jews living throughout the world, especially university students who are constantly being attacked for their affiliation with so-called “occupiers.” Instead of being demoralized and disenchanted with Israel, knowing our eternally true claim to the land protects them from this venomous hatred and its inevitable results.

And if you wonder whether this resonates with the majority of Jews currently living in Eretz Yisroel, consider this story told by Israeli journalist Shlomo Shamir. As a foreign correspondent for the Israeli newspaper Ha’aretz he merited to be in *yechidus* with the Rebbe. Once, after a two-hour *yechidus*, he published a lengthy article with the following quotes.

*“Every single Jew living in Israel today is a great believer,” [the Rebbe] said, “sometimes without even knowing it. The Land of Israel is a ‘barrel overflowing with faith,’ just waiting for the spark to ignite it into a great flame.*

*“Take, for instance, a Jewish man who lives in Eretz Yisrael and is a member of the Communist party. He’s a Communist, right? I believe that he is a great believer. There he is, living with his wife and children in a country surrounded by enemies who wish to annihilate him and his children. What’s keeping this Jew in Eretz Yisrael? Faith in Marxism? No, I don’t think so. He lives in Eretz Yisrael, and every once in a while rises up to defend it, because — perhaps unbeknownst to him — he believes in G-d and in the fact that Eretz Yisrael was given to the People of Israel. We only have to awaken inside of him the awareness of his faith, then guide him into keeping the commandments. We must teach him that observing Shabbat, Kashrus and putting on Tefillin are the natural extension of the faith which is alive inside him.”* **T**

### NEXT MONTH:

Can we seriously use our biblical claim to Eretz Yisroel when engaging with the non-Jewish world?

**Primary Sources:** *1 Iyar* 5735; *Toras Menachem* vol. 80, p. 137, *Lag B’Omer* 5738; *Sichos Kodesh* vol. 2, p. 339, *20 Av* 5738; *Sichos Kodesh* vol. 3, p. 276, *Letter to Israeli Journalist Geulah Cohen*, *Igros Kodesh* vol. 26, p. 143, *Letter to Israeli President Zalman Shazar*, *ibid.* p. 166, *chabad.org/66878*.