
THE CENTRALITY OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

The Land of Israel is central to the history of the Jewish people. Its physical and spiritual qualities have made it the object of yearning of generations of Jews. The very purpose of the Jewish people – a nation whose highest value is living according to the wisdom of God – is intimately associated with living in the Land of Israel. On an individual basis, a person's growth in character and closeness to God can be greatly assisted by his presence in the Land of Israel. This class analyzes:

- ~ How did the Land of Israel become so central to the Jewish people?
- ~ What makes the Land of Israel different to other lands?
- ~ Why would a piece of land be necessary for the mission of the Jewish people?
- ~ What events are predicted to occur in the Land of Israel in the pre-Messianic Era?

Class Outline:

- Section I. The Promise of the Land of Israel
- Section II. The Physical Qualities of the Land
- Section III. The Purpose of the Land of Israel
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 - Part B. The Land of Israel as a Means for the Perfection of the Jewish People
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- Section IV. The Spiritual Qualities of the Land of Israel
 - Part A. God's Presence is More Easily Recognized in the Land of Israel
 - Part B. Divine Intervention in Everyday Affairs (*Hashgachah Pratit*) is More Easily Recognized in the Land of Israel
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SECTION I. THE PROMISE OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

The Jewish connection and claim to the Land of Israel dates back to Avraham (Abraham) (c. 1800 B.C.E.). The promise of the land to him and his descendants was re-iterated by God through history. Each of the forefathers – Avraham, Yitzchak (Isaac) and Yaakov (Jacob) – was assured that the land would belong to their descendants.

1. Bereishit (Genesis) 12:1-2 – The instruction to Avraham to go to the Land of Israel as a fulfillment of his spiritual destiny to bring ethical monotheism to the world.

Go [for your benefit], from your land, from your relatives, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make you into a great nation; I will bless you, and make your name great, and you shall be a blessing.

ויאמר ה' אל אברם לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך אל הארץ אשר אראך. ואעשך לגוי גדול ואברכך ואגדלה שמך והיה ברכה:

2. Ibid. 26:2-3 – The Promise to Yitzchak and his offspring that they would receive the land.

God appeared to him [Yitzchak] and said: "... live in this land and I will be with you and bless you. For to you and your offspring will I give all these lands, and establish the oath that I swore to Avraham your father."

וירא אליו ה' ויאמר אל תרד מצרימה שכן בארץ אשר אמר אליך. גור בארץ הזאת ואהיה עמך ואברכך כי לך ולזרעך אתן את כל הארצות האל והקמתי את השבעה אשר נשבעתי לאברהם אביך:

3. Ibid. 35:9-12 – The Promise of the Land to Yaakov and his offspring.

And God appeared to Yaakov again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. Then God said to him: "Your name is Yaakov. Your name shall not always be called Yaakov, but Yisrael (Israel) shall be your name ... the land that I gave to Avraham and to Yitzchak, I will give to you; and to your offspring after you I will give the land."

וירא אלהים אל יעקב עוד בבאו מפדן ארם ויברך אותו: ויאמר לו אלהים שמך יעקב לא יקרא שמך עוד יעקב כי אם ישראל יהיה שמך ויקרא את שמו ישראל: ויאמר לו אלהים אני אל שדי פרה ורבה גוי וקהל גוים יהיה ממך ומלכים מחלציך יצאו: ואת הארץ אשר נתתי לאברהם וליצחק לך אתננה ולזרעך אחריך אתן את הארץ:

4. Shemot (Exodus) 3:8 – The promise of the national redemption from Egyptian slavery and guidance to the Land of Israel.

[God said to Moses:] "I will come down to rescue them from the hand of Egypt, and to bring them up from that land to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey ..."

וארד להצילו מיד מצרים ולהעלותו מן הארץ ההוא אל ארץ טובה ורחבה אל ארץ זבת חלב ודבש ...:

5. Yehoshua (Joshua) 1:2-4 – The entry of Yehoshua and the nation to the Land of Israel after forty years of wandering in the Sinai Desert. The delineation of the Land's boundaries.

[God said to Yehoshua:] "Moshe (Moses) My servant has died. Now, arise, cross this Jordan,

משה עבדי מת ועתה קום עבר את הירדן הזה אתה וכל העם הזה אל הארץ אשר אנכי נתן להם לבני ישראל:

you and this entire people, to the land that I give to them, to the Children of Israel. Every place upon which the sole of your foot will tread I have given to you, as I spoke to Moshe. From the desert and this Lebanon until the great river, the Euphrates River, all the land of the Hittites until the Great Sea toward the setting of the sun will be your boundary.”

כל מקום אשר תדרך כף רגלכם בו לכם נתתיו כאשר
דברתי אל משה:
מהמדבר והלבנון הזה ועד הנהר הגדול נהר פרת
כל ארץ החתים ועד הים הגדול מבוא השמש יהיה
גבולכם:

6. **Rashi, Bereishit 1:1 – The Torah begins with a history of the world to prove to the Jewish people themselves that the Land rightfully belongs to whomever God grants it.**

The commandments of the Torah include many which are dependent upon the occupancy of the Land of Israel by the Jewish people. The Jews might react to their claim with a guilty conscience, feeling that the Land rightfully belongs to others. The Torah therefore begins with a history of the world and the development of the nation to prove to the Jewish people themselves that the Land rightfully belongs to whomever God grants it (based on Nachalat Yaakov, Bereishit 1:1)

“In the beginning [of God’s creating the heavens and the earth].” Rabbi Yitzchak said: “God only needed to begin the Torah from ‘This month shall be for you [the beginning of the months]’ (Shemot 12:2) because this is the first commandment which the People of Israel were commanded. What is the reason that He began with the book of Bereishit?

בראשית [ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ] - אמר
רבי יצחק לא היה צריך להתחיל [את] התורה אלא
(שמות יב ב) מהחודש הזה לכם, שהיא מצוה ראשונה
שנצטוו [בה] ישראל, ומה טעם פתח בבראשית?

“Because [He wished to convey the message of the verse], ‘The power of His acts He told to His people, in order to give them the inherited land of the nations’ (Tehillim/Psalms 111:6). So that if the nations of the world will say to Israel, ‘You are thieves, for you conquered the lands of the seven nations [who inhabited the Land of Canaan],’ Israel will say to them, ‘The whole earth belongs to the Holy One, Blessed be He. He created it and He gave it to the one found proper in His eyes. By His wish He gave it to them, and by His wish He took it from them and gave it to us’ (Bereishit Rabbah 1:2).”

משום (תהלים קיא ו) כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו לתת להם
נחלת גוים, שאם יאמרו אומות העולם לישראל לסטים
אתם, שכבשתם ארצות שבעה גוים, הם אומרים להם
כל הארץ של הקב"ה היא, הוא בראה ונתנה לאשר ישר
בעיניו, ברצונו נתנה להם וברצונו נטלה מהם ונתנה לנו:

7. **Yoel (Joel) 4:2 – The nation of Israel is called “My people,” and the Land of Israel “My land” – it is fitting that “My people” were given “My land.”**

I will gather all of the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat and I will contend with them there concerning My people and My possession, Israel, that they dispersed among the nations, and they divided up My land.

וקבצתי את כל הגוים והורדתים אל עמק יהושפט
ונשפטתי עמם שם על עמי ונחלתי ישראל אשר פזרו
בגוים ואת ארצי חלקו:

SECTION II. THE PHYSICAL QUALITIES OF THE LAND

What are the unique physical features of the Land of Israel?

1. **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 8:7-10 – The Land is fertile and filled with natural resources.**

For the Lord, your God, is bringing you to a good land: a land with streams of water, of springs and underground water coming forth in valley and mountain; a land of wheat, barley, grape, fig, and pomegranate; a land of oil-olives and date-honey; a land where you will eat bread without poverty – you will lack nothing there; a land whose stones are iron and from whose mountains you will mine copper. You will eat and you will be satisfied, and bless the Lord, your God, for the good land that he gave you.

כי ה' אלהיך מביאך אל ארץ טובה ארץ נחלי מים עינת ותהמת יצאים בבקעה ובהר: ארץ חטה ושערה וגפן ותאנה ורמון ארץ זית שמן ודבש: ארץ אשר לא במסכנת תאכל בה לחם לא תחסר כל בה ארץ אשר אבניה ברזל ומהרריה תחצב נחשת: ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה' אלהיך על הארץ הטובה אשר נתן לך:

2. **Talmud Bavli (Babylonian Talmud), Ketubot 111b – A land flowing with milk and honey.**

Rami, the son of Yechezkel, traveled to Bnei Brak. There he saw goats eating under the fig trees. Honey was dripping from the figs, and milk was flowing from the goats, and they mixed together. He exclaimed, "This is [a land] flowing with milk and honey!"

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.

3. **Josephus, The Jewish Wars (First Century), Book III, 3:2, Penguin Publications, p. 192 – The land is highly fertile and productive.**

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 on 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 15,000 inhabitants.

4. **Maharsha, Chiddushei Aggadot, Sanhedrin 98a – The fertility of the Land of Israel is dependent on the presence of the Jewish people.**

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.

[אין לך קץ מגולה מזה וכו' שנאמר ואתם הרי גוי.] 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.

5. Rashi, Devarim 1:25 – The Land of Israel is higher than all other lands

“[The spies took fruit of the Land of Israel] and brought it down to us.” This tells us that the Land of Israel is higher than all other lands.

[ויקחו בידם מפרי הארץ] ויורדו אלינו - מגיד שארץ ישראל גבוהה מכל הארצות:

6. Maharsha, Chiddushei Aggadot, Kiddushin 69a – The Land of Israel is highest in a physical sense.

[The Maharsha comments on the following statement in the Gemara:] “The Temple is higher than all of the Land of Israel, and the Land of Israel is higher than all other lands.” The earth is [a sphere] like an apple, and the location of the Temple is at the center [focus] of the earth, and so too the Land of Israel [both are viewed as being at the top of the sphere. Therefore, traveling from anywhere to the Land of Israel is viewed as an ascent.]

שבית המקדש גבוה מכל ארץ ישראל, וארץ ישראל גבוהה מכל הארצות. שהעולם הוא כתפוח ומקום בהמ"ק הוא מרכז עולם וכן א"י . . .

7. Maharal, Chiddushei Aggadot, Kiddushin 69a – Since the earth is a sphere, there is no highest point in a physical sense. Therefore, the Land of Israel is highest in a spiritual sense.

[The Maharal comments on a statement in the Gemara:] “The Land of Israel is higher than all the lands, and the Temple is higher than all of the Land of Israel.” The reason is because the Land of Israel is more holy than all other lands, and the Temple is more holy than the rest of the Land of Israel. That which is holy is referred to as “above”, and that which is material is referred to as “below.”

Therefore, even if it is true that the earth is like a sphere, [but] the sphere appears the same from all sides . . . [and therefore] it is possible to [arbitrarily] assume that any point on the sphere is the highest point. [In other words, why should we assume that the Land of Israel is the highest point of the sphere?]

Nevertheless, one should assume that the top of the sphere is the Land of Israel since its level of *holiness* is higher than the rest of the world. Therefore, when one travels to the Land of Israel one refers to it as “ascending.” And it is a further ascent when one travels to the Temple.

ארץ ישראל גבוהה מכל הארצות ובית המקדש מכל ארץ ישראל. וזה כי ארץ ישראל קדושה מכל הארצות, ובית המקדש קדוש מכל ארץ ישראל, ודבר שהוא קדוש עליון הוא והחמרי הוא שפל.

ולכך אף אם תאמר כי כל הארץ הוא ככדור והכדור שווה בכל צד . . . יכול להניח הראש בכל מקום מן הכדור, מ"מ יש להניח ראש הכדור א"י מפני מדריגת קדושתה שהוא מתעלה על שאר הארץ. ומפני זה יאמר כאשר הולך אל ארץ ישראל שהוא עולה, ויותר נקרא עליה כאשר הולך לבית המקדש . . .

SECTION III. THE PURPOSE OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

What is the source of the Jewish longing to return to the Land of Israel, despite centuries of exile? Surely the Jewish people dwelled in host countries whose natural resources were comparable to the Land of Israel. The Land of Israel is not only superior in its natural resources, but also in its spiritual resources.

PART A. THE LAND OF ISRAEL AS A PLACE TO PERFORM MITZVOT

Many mitzvot of the Torah, in particular those related to agriculture and to the Jewish kingship, are dependent on dwelling in the Land of Israel. In fact, the Land of Israel is the ideal place for the performance of all the mitzvot. According to many authorities, there is therefore a positive mitzvah to live in the Holy Land, where one is able to achieve a closer connection with God, and perform His commandments on the highest level.

1. Devarim 6:1, 12:1 – The mitzvot are to be performed in the Land of Israel.

This is the commandment, and the decrees, and the ordinances that the Lord, your God, commanded to teach you, to perform in the land to which you are crossing, to possess it.

These are the decrees and the ordinances that you shall observe to perform in the land that Hashem, the God of your forefathers, has given you, to possess it, all the days that you live on the land.

וזאת המצוה החקים והמשפטים אשר צוה ה'
א-להיכם ללמד אתכם לעשות בארץ אשר אתם
עברים שמה לרשתה:

אלה החקים והמשפטים אשר תשמרון לעשות בארץ
אשר נתן ה' א-להי אבותיך לך לרשתה כל הימים אשר
אתם חיים על האדמה:

2. Ramban (Nachmanides), Vayikra (Leviticus) 18:25, – Performance of the mitzvot 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 mitzvot so that when you return they will not be new and unfamiliar to you. An analogy: a man is upset with his wife and sends her to her father’s house. He says to her: “Keep wearing your jewelry, so that when you return they will not be new and unfamiliar to you.”

אמרו בספרי (עקב מג), ואבדתם מהרה (דברים יא ז),
אף על פי שאני מגולה אתכם מן הארץ לחוצה לארץ
היו מצויינין במצות שכשתחזרו לא יהו עליכם חדשים,
משל לאדון שכעס על אשתו ושלחה לבית אביה, אמר
לה הוי מתקשטת תכשיטים שכשתחזרי לא יהיו עליך
חדשים ...

3. Pitchei Teshuvah, Even Ha'Ezer 75:1 – According to most authorities, the mitzvah of living in the Land of Israel applies at all times.

Ramban numbers this mitzvah among the [613] mitzvot, from the verse, “You will inherit it, and dwell upon it” (Devarim 11:21). He further

הנה הרמב"ן מנה מצוה זו בכלל מצות, מקרא
ד'וירשתם אותה וישבתם בה'. וכי היא שקולה כנגד כל
המצוות כדאיתא בספרי וגם התרומת הדין בפסקיו

states that it is equal in gravity to all of the mitzvot, as the Sifrei states. Even the *Terumat Hadeshen*, in his rulings (85), lauded this mitzvah ... And this is the truth, as the *Netivot Hamishpat* has also affirmed. Therefore, all times are equal concerning this mitzvah [and it applies even during times of exile].

סי' פ"ח הפליג בה... והדין עמו, וכ"כ בעל נתיבות משפט. וא"כ כל הזמנים שווים לקיום מצוה זו.

4. Sifrei 28 – Dwelling in the Land of Israel is equated to all of the mitzvot.

“You shall possess it [the land] and you shall settle in it. You must be careful to fulfill [all the decrees and the laws that I present before you today]” (Devarim 11:31-32) ... settling the land of Israel is equated with all the mitzvot of the Torah.

וירשתם אותה וישבתם בה ושמרתם לעשות (דברים יא לא לב) ... ישיבת ארץ ישראל שקולה כנגד כל המצוות שבתורה.

Further, Rambam (Maimonides) maintains that if, in theory, a time would ever come when no Jews at all would live in the Land of Israel, the entire Jewish calendar would lose its validity, and we would not be able to observe any of the festivals (Rambam, Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Commandment 153). The presence of Jews on the Land is therefore a prerequisite for the practice of Judaism everywhere.

5. Talmud Bavli, Ketubot 111a – There is great reward for those in the Land of Israel.

All who walk four *amot* in the Land of Israel are guaranteed to be in the World to Come.

כל המהלך ארבע אמות בארץ ישראל מובטח לו שהוא בן העולם הבא.

PART B. THE LAND OF ISRAEL AS A MEANS FOR THE PERFECTION OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE .

The Land of Israel is a means for the Jewish people to strive for perfection. The Land is not a pre-requisite for our existence.

1. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. III, pp. 33-34 – First we became a nation, then we received the land. Our existence as a nation does not depend on the land.

The purpose of leaving Egypt was to receive the Torah. We received the land of Israel as an “instrument” or a means with which to fulfill the Torah. We have no other purpose in [living in] the Land of Israel apart from this.

The Jewish people did not receive the land of Israel in the same way that other nations need a piece of land to ensure their physical survival. The Jewish people were born in the desert after leaving Egypt. We received the Torah there, and were taken from there as “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Shemot 19:6).

תכלית יציאת מצרים היא קבלת התורה. את ארץ ישראל קבלנו בתורת “כלי” לקיים את התורה, אין לנו שום תכלית אחרת בא”י מלבד זאת.

עם ישראל לא קיבל את הארץ כדרך כל העמים הזקוקים לפיסת אדמה לצורך קיומם הפיזי, עם ישראל נולד במדבר לאחר שיצא ממצרים, את התורה קיבל שם, ואף שם במדבר התגבש לממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש.

We did not become a nation by settling together in the Land of Israel. Rather, on the contrary, through our being a [unified] nation we received the Torah, then we remained in the desert for forty years eating manna, and only after all this did we receive an additional “instrument” with which to fulfill the Torah: the Land of Israel.

לא בהתיישבם בא"י נעשו לעם אלא להעך: עם היותם לעם קיבלו את התורה, ושוב במשך ארבעים שנה נוספות שהו במדבר ואכלו מן, רק לאחר מכן קיבלו "כלי" נוסף לקיום התורה: ארץ ישראל.

2. **Ibid. Vol. I, p. 422 – The land of Israel is a place to strive for a perfection of character and service of God that is not possible elsewhere.**

[Rabbi Friedlander comments on the following phrase in the Aleinu prayer:] “He has not made us like the nations of the [other] lands ...” certainly, the Land of Israel is for us a wondrous “instrument” and means with which to serve God in a perfect way, by means of the mitzvot that can only be done in the land and [because of] its special holiness. The perfection that one can achieve in the Land of Israel is not possible outside it. On the other hand, the existence of the Jewish people is not dependent on their *being* in the Land of Israel. When we are exiled from the Land of Israel and dwell in other countries, we remain the same nation of God as we were while living in the Land of Israel.

“שלא עשנו כגויי הארצות.” . . . בוודאי ארץ ישראל היא בשבילנו כלי נפלא לעבודת ה' בשלימות על-ידי המצוות התלויות בה וקדושתה המיוחדת, והשלימות שזוכים לה בא"י בלתי ניתנת להשגה בחו"ל, אך מאידך גיסא קיום עם ישראל אינו מותנה בכך שיהיו בארץ ישראל, וכאשר מגרשים אותנו מא"י, אנו נשארים בחו"ל אותו עם עם ה' כמו בהיותנו בא"י.

PART C. THE LAND OF ISRAEL AS THE PARAMOUNT LOCATION FOR TORAH STUDY

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler below comments on the following two statements regarding Torah study in the Land of Israel:

1. **Sifrei, Parshat Eikev – Torah study in the Land of Israel is incomparable to learning elsewhere.**

There is no Torah [study] like that of the Land of Israel.

אין תורה כתורת ארץ ישראל.

2. **Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 155b – Wisdom is easily attained in the Land of Israel.**

The air of the Land of Israel makes a person wise.

אוריא דארץ ישראל מחכים.

3. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol. III, p. 196 – The Land of Israel is most conducive for Torah study.**

[Based on the above two sources, Rabbi Dessler

שהעוסק בתורה בארץ ישראל זוכה לסייעתה דשמיא

comments:] One who engages in Torah study in the Land of Israel is assisted greatly by God, and receives a unique flow of spiritual energy ... In our generation we see firsthand how young people are developing and growing through engaging in Torah in the Land of Israel. They ascend in their studies, they are successful acquiring knowledge in all areas of the Gemara, and they accomplish much more than they would have in Torah institutions outside of the Land of Israel.

May the Holy One pour assistance upon us and give us resources [like the Land of Israel]. Let us prepare ourselves to be fitting recipients [for such assistance], and not underestimate its value. Rather, in our growth in Torah and awareness of God, may we utilize such assistance to its full extent.

מרוכה והשפעה מיוחדת... בדורנו אנו רואים בחוש כיצד צעירים העוסקים בתורה מתפתחים בארץ ישראל. הם עולים בלמוד, מצליחים לרכוש ידיעה בש"ס כולו, ומשיגים הרבה יותר מאשר משיגים בחנוך התורני בשאר הארצות.

הקב"ה משפיע עלינו שפה של סיועים וכלים. הבה נתכונן להיות ראויים להם, ולא נזלזל בערכם ה"ו, אלא ננצלם עד תומם בעלייתנו בתורה ויראת שמים.

PART D. THE LAND OF ISRAEL AS A MODEL SOCIETY FOR THE WORLD

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

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.

2. **Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, Sefer HaKuzari, 2:16 – The purpose of the Land of Israel is to rectify the world.**

This land, which was designated for the purpose of rectifying the entire world, was set aside as an inheritance for the tribes of the sons of Israel after the Generation of the Dispersion [the tower of Babel]. This is what is meant by the verse: “When the Supreme One gave the nations their inheritance, when He separated the children of man, He set the borders of the peoples...” (Devarim 32:8).

הארץ הזאת, הנועדת להישרת כל העולם, הוכנה כנחלה לשבטי בני ישראל מאז נפלגו הלשונות, כמה שנאמר: “בהנחל עליון גוים [בהפרידו בני אדם יצב גבלת עמים...]”.

3. **Rabbi Becher, Gateway to Judaism – 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.

SECTION IV. THE SPIRITUAL QUALITIES OF THE LAND OF ISRAEL

PART A. GOD’S PRESENCE IS MORE EASILY RECOGNIZED IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL

Although God permeates all of time and space equally, we are not able to perceive His Presence equally in all times and all places (Rabbi Chaim Volozhin, Nefesh HaChaim, Shaar 3, Ch. 4-6; Zohar, Raya Meheimnah 3:225a).

1. **Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Michtav M’Eliyahu Vol. I, p. 11 – Generations of Jews are drawn to the sublime holiness of the Land of Israel.**

It is amazing to consider how over the last 2,000 years of exile from our Land, the love for the Land has remained in our hearts. How is this love possible?

[The answer is that] the Land of Israel does not represent a center of our nationhood the way it does for other nations. If that were the case, the Holy Land would already have been forgotten, like other nations who forget their homeland after long periods of exile. Rather, the love for the Land is rooted in holiness. The holiness of this land – in which God is [readily] found – is the same holiness that is inside of us. It is an inheritance located in our souls, which we received from Avraham, after he overcame the test of *lech lecha* [in which he had to leave his home, his birthplace, and his country to come the Land of Israel].

מה נפלה הוא, זה אלפים שנה שגלינו מארצנו, ואיך נשארה אהבתה בלבנו?

יען כי אין זו אצלנו לאומיות כמו אצל העמים – כי אז כבר היתה ח"ו ארץ הקדושה שכוחה מלבותינו, כמו בשאר העמים שגלו זמן רב מארצם, אבל אהבה זו תלויה בקדושה, והיא הקדושה שבארץ ההיא, ששם בה הקב"ה, ואותה קדושה דבוקה בנו, כי ירושה היא בנפשנו מאבינו אברהם, שמוסר נפשו לעמוד בנסיון לך לך.

2. **Midrash Rabbah, Shemot 2:2 – The Shechinah will never leave the Western Wall.**

Rav Acha said: The *Shechinah* [Presence of God] will never leave the Western Wall, as it is written, “Behold, He stands behind our wall” (Shir HaShirim/Song of Songs, 2:9).

א"ר אחא לעולם אין השכינה זזה מכותל המערבי, שנאמר הנה זה מדלג אחר כתלנו.

3. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim Vol. III, p. 289 – The *Shechinah* is most revealed in the land of Israel.**

[Rabbi Friedlander cites a phrase from The Understanding Heart, *Da'at Tevunot*, by the Ramchal and explains it:] “The place for the revelation of the light of the *Shechinah* [Presence of God] in its complete form is in the land of Israel” – the root of the revelation comes from a high [spiritual] level, and the effect of this revelation is manifested in the Land of Israel.

”אור השכינה בתיקונו הוא ממקום כבודה באצילות עד ארץ ישראל.” – שורש הגילוי הוה ממקום גבוה, והשפעת גילוי שכינה בפועל מתגלה בארץ ישראל – במקום המקדש, זהו המצב התקין כשהשפעת השפע הולכת באופן ישיר לעם ישראל בארץ ישראל.

4. **Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, Sefer HaKuzari 4:10 – It is not a coincidence that many religions feel a special connection to Israel.**

The two religions that came after yours [Christianity and Islam which followed Judaism] – when they acknowledge the truth and do not deny it, then they attribute great virtue to this place [the Land of Israel], and say that it is the place of prophets, a gate to heaven, a place of complete justice ...

גם הדתות שבאו אחריכם, אם הם מודות באמת ואינן מכחישות אותה, מיחסות יתרון למקום ההוא ואומרות כי הוא מקום העלות הנביאים ושער השמים ומקום המשפט החרוץ...

PART B. DIVINE INTERVENTION IN EVERYDAY AFFAIRS (HASHGACHAH PRATIT) IS MORE EASILY RECOGNIZED IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL

1. **Devarim 11:12 – God’s involvement with the Land of Israel is more intense.**

A land that the Lord your God scrutinizes constantly; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year.

ארץ אשר ה' אלהיך דרש אתה תמיד עיני ה' אלהיך בה מרשית השנה ועד אחרית שנה.

2. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Sifsei Chaim, Vol. III, p. 34 – God’s personal intervention is more easily recognized in the Land of Israel and it is easier to attain closeness to Him.**

It is true that the eyes of God are focused on the entire world, nevertheless, compared to the rest of the world, we recognize God’s personal intervention in everyday affairs (*hashgachah pratit*) in a more pronounced fashion in the Land of Israel. This is what is meant by the verse: “A land that the Lord, your God, scrutinizes constantly...” (Devarim 11:12).

This is the special power of the Land of Israel: there is the opportunity for greater closeness to the Holy One, and it teaches us about God’s intervention in everyday affairs. For this reason prophecy is only possible in the Land of Israel ...

הן אמת שעניי ה' משוטטות בכל הארץ, בכל אופן בא"י מכירים את השגחת הקב"ה בצורה בולטת מאשר בחו"ל. שנאמר "ארץ אשר ה' אלהיך דרש אתה תמיד עיני ה' אלהיך בה מרשית השנה ועד אחרית שנה" (דברים יא, יב).

זוהי סגולת א"י שנותנת את האפשרות של קירוב יתירה אל הקב"ה, ומלמדת ההשגחה פרטית. מטעם זה רק בא"י שורה הנבואה ...

PART C. PROPHECY IS ONLY POSSIBLE IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL**1. Ramban, Devarim 18:15 – Prophecy only exists in Israel.**

“A prophet from your midst, from your brethren, like me [Moshe] shall the Lord, your God, establish for you” – The phrase “from your midst” hints that prophecy only exists in the Land of Israel.

נביא מקרבך מאחיד כמני - טעם "מקרבך", לרמז שאין נבואה אלא בארץ ישראל ...

2. Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, Sefer HaKuzari 2:14 – One can have prophecy outside of the Land of Israel if it is for the sake of the Jewish people (when there had been prior prophecy inside the Land).

Anyone who had prophecy, only had it inside of the Land of Israel or for the sake of Israel.

כל מי שנתנבא לא נתנבא כי אם בה או בעבורה.

3. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Handbook of Jewish Thought, Vol. 1, 6:44, 6:88 – Prophecy can only be achieved in the Land of Israel when the majority of the world's Jews live in the land.

Since prophecy requires the highest degree of sanctification, it can only be attained in the Land of Israel, which is the Holy Land. It is thus written, “God your Lord will raise up a prophet *in your midst*” (Devarim 18:15). This implies that prophecy would only take place in the Land of Israel when it is settled by the Israelites (Sifri, Yalkut Shimoni 1:919). A prophet can therefore only obtain his first revelation in the Holy Land, however, he can later obtain a vision even in other lands (Rashi, Yechezkel/Ezekiel 1:3), provided that it is absolutely necessary for the sake of Israel. Even in such cases, however, the vision could only be obtained in a secluded place, such as in a valley or near a river, which is not contaminated by the general populace (Mechiltah, Shemot 12:1).

Moreover, prophecy can only exist in the Holy Land when it is inhabited by the majority of Israelites in the world. Therefore, when the majority of Israelites refused to return to the Holy Land in the time of Ezra, the land ceased to have its special status with respect to prophecy, and prophecy ceased to exist (Yoma 9b). However, it will be restored in the Messianic age, when the majority of Israelites once again live in the Holy Land.

SECTION V. THE LAND OF ISRAEL IN THE PRE-MESSIANIC ERA

1. Devarim 30:3-5 – The promise of the return from exile to the Land of Israel.

And the Lord your God will return you from your captivity, and have compassion upon you. He will return and gather you from among all the nations ... And the Lord your God will bring you into the land that your fathers inherited. You will acquire it, and He will make you even more prosperous and numerous than your fathers.

ושב ה' אלהיך את שבותך ורחמך ושב וקבצך מכל העמים אשר הפיצך ה' אלהיך שמה: אם יהיה נדחך בקצה השמים משם יקבצך ה' אלהיך ומשם יקחך: והביאך ה' אלהיך אל הארץ אשר ירשו אבותיך וירשתה והיטבך והרבך מאבתיך:

2. Yechezkel 11:17 – Ingathering from among the nations.

Therefore, say [to the people]: “Thus says God: I will assemble you from the nations, and gather you in from the lands where you have been scattered and I will give you the Land of Israel.”

לכן אמר כה אמר אדני ה' וקבצתי אתכם מן העמים
ואספתי אתכם מן הארצות אשר נפצותם בהם ונתתי
לכם את אדמת ישראל:

3. Siddur, Shemoneh Esrei (Silent Standing Prayer), 10 blessing – Jews pray three times a day that they return to the Land of Israel.

Sound the great shofar for our freedom, raise the banner to gather our exiles and gather us together from the four corners of the earth. Blessed are You, God, Who gathers in the dispersed of His people Israel.

תקע בשופר גדול לחרותנו, ושא נס לקבץ גליותנו,
וקבצנו יחד מארבע כנפות הארץ: ברוך אתה ה', מקבץ
נדחי עמו ישראל:

4. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Handbook of Jewish Thought, Vol. II, 24:18 – In the unfolding of Messianic Era, the Jews will return to the Land of Israel and Jerusalem will be rebuilt.

One of the most important traditions regarding the Messianic Era concerns the ingathering of the Diaspora and the resettlement of the Land of Israel. There are numerous traditions that the Jewish people will begin to return to the Land of Israel as a prelude to the Messiah. The ingathering will begin with a measure of political independence (Rabbi Chama, Sanhedrin 98a), and according to some, with the permission of the other nations (Ramban, Shir HaShirim 8:13).

As the holiest spot in the Land of Israel, Jerusalem is the most important city that must be rebuilt there (Responsa Chassam Sofer, Yoreh De'ah 234). There is a tradition that the ingathering of the exiles and the rebuilding of Jerusalem will go hand in hand as the two most important preludes to the coming of the Messiah. According to this tradition, first a small percentage of the exiles will return to the Holy Land, and then Jerusalem will come under Jewish control and be rebuilt. Only then will the majority of Jews in the world return to their homeland. It is thus written, “God is rebuilding Jerusalem; [then] He will gather in the dispersed on Israel” (Tehillim 147:2) (see Berachot 49a, and Rashi there).

5. Passover Haggadah – Our prayer that the Jewish people will soon return to Jerusalem.

Next year in Jerusalem!

לשנה הבאה בירושלים.

