

The Land of Israel in the Parsha & Our Lives

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Parashat Bereishit

How Does the Creation Story Teach Us About the Jewish Right to the Land of Israel?

Why Can We Only Celebrate the Jewish Holidays Fully in the Land of Israel?

Shabbat *Bereishit* leaps surprisingly into my lap, and onto my pillow last night waking me up to ponder a new blog theme. Having written a weekly blog for nearly 15 years, I've already exhausted many topics. What should I write about that will capture my own interest and that of my readers? I was thinking of "Reincarnations in the Torah" but would I find enough material for each weekly Parasha? I finally settled on Miracles in the Parasha and in Our Lives and made the graphic icon for each Torah book. However, when I sat down to start writing, I just wanted to write about the Land of Israel. I was seized by the fervent feeling that strengthening our bond with the Promised Land – and anchoring our understanding of our right to it – is crucial for fully conquering it. So, I adapted the graphics and here I come to tell you how and why I love living in Israel right now, and to share the very first Rashi of the Torah with you which so precisely describes our rights to the land of Israel. I have only a very short time as the sweet potatoes, cashews, red peppers, eggplants, olives, and cilantro await me in the kitchen as well as the pecans and the honey, and guests will join us for Simchat Torah and Shabbat to partake in delicious salads, dips, fish and chicken, so this will be brief. Coming out of Sukkot really strengthens our awareness that living in Israel is vital for keeping the Torah to its fullest! How lovely it has been to dwell in the Sukkah at this time, when it's a bit cool but still pleasant enough for the men to sleep under the stars, in earshot of the prayerful singing of various neighbors. Here in Israel, we really get to experience the Torah indictment: "For a seven-day period you shall live in Sukkot (booths). Every resident among the Israelites shall live in Sukkot" (*Vayikra* 23:42). This teaches that all of the Jewish people are fit to reside in one Sukkah. (*Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah* 27b).

The Weather in Israel is a Spiritual Barometer for Our Relationship With G-d

When we lived briefly in the USA, how far we were from feeling that unity of living with all of Israel in one Sukkah? I also recall how the rain started to pour down flooding our Sukkah with all its decorations and heavy sleeping bags, that we were forced to seek shelter indoors. Luckily, our sleeping bags hanging in the courtyard bothered our gentile neighbors enough to throw them in the washer and dryer! In Israel, it rarely rains on Sukkot, but if it does, "It is comparable to a servant who comes to pour wine for his Master, and the Master pours a pitcher of water in his (the servant's) face, saying to him: I do not want your service" (*Babylonian Talmud, Sukkah* 29a). In general, the weather in Israel is a spiritual barometer for our relationship with G-d. If He withholds the rains from us, we must pray harder, as it states,

סַפַּר בְּרֵאשִׁית פָּרֶקֶן בַּפְּסוּקֵי הַיְיָ וְכָל שִׁיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִהְיֶה בְּאֶרֶץ וְכָל עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה טָרָם יִצְמַח כִּי לֹא הָיָה עוֹלָם עַל הָאָרֶץ וְאָדָם אֵין לְעַבֵּד אֶת הָאֲדָמָה:

"Now no tree of the field was yet on the earth, neither did any herb of the field yet grow, because the Hashem, G-d had not brought rain upon the earth, and there was no man to work the soil (*Bereishit* 2:5).

Although the plants were created on the third day of creation, they waited beneath the earth and didn't sprout forth until Adam came "to work the soil" which can be understood metaphorically as "to pray for rain."

Until the creation of humanity, no one recognized the benefit of rain, but when Adam came and understood that they were essential to the world, he prayed for them, they fell, and the trees and the herbs sprouted (Rashi, *Bereishit* 2:5 based on *BT, Chulin* 60b). If we don't receive enough rain by Chanukah, it will greatly affect not only farmers but all of us. During such times, we must engage in self-introspection and repent, as we live with the awareness that the rain, or lack thereof is the heavenly response to our actions. "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain [it is] because your people have sinned against You..." (I *Melachim* 8:35). At such times, the Rabbis institute national fast days and we turn inward to rectify our deeds. During Sukkot when we dwell in flimsy huts exposed to the elements, the weather affects us even more, and through it, we experience our relationship with the Divine on a greater scale. Here in Bat Ayin – through the comfortable, cooling weather – I felt Hashem comforting us during this Sukkot and Simchat Torah. The cold wind only intensified the day we left the Sukkah and Bauch Hashem we were able to dance again like never before! Although we feel the pain of having been at war for a full year now, we are proud of our little country on the mission of eradicating evil from the entire world. On Simchat Torah, we began praising Hashem for rain, by inserting in our Shemoneh Esre Amidah "Who makes the wind blow and brings down the rain." May all our suffering this year be an atonement for our sins and may Hashem open the sky and shower us with abundant rain!

The Jewish People Serving Hashem in the Land of Israel is the Purpose of Creation

The Torah opens by describing Hashem's creation of heaven and earth:

סֵפֶר בְּרֵאשִׁית פֶּרֶק א' פְּסוּק א' בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

"In the beginning of G-d's creation of the heavens and the earth" (*Bereishit* 1:1).

Although it may seem to us a perfect beginning to start the Torah with the creation story, our commentaries feel otherwise. Since the Torah is not a history book but a manual for proper living and serving our creator, Rashi questions why it doesn't begin with recounting the first mitzvah in the Torah. Now for what reason did He commence with "In the beginning?" Because of [the verse] "The strength of His works He related to His people, to give them the inheritance of the nations" (*Tehillim* 111:6). For if the nations of the world should say to Israel, "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 Holy One, blessed be He; He created it (this we learn from the story of the Creation) and gave it to whomever He deemed proper. When He wished, He gave it to them, and when He wished, He took it away from them and gave it to us (Rashi, *Bereishit* 1:1). I find it mind-boggling that Rashi – nearly a thousand years ago when we were submerged deeply in exile before any Zionistic movement had emerged – could predict how the nations will accuse us of robbing the Land of Israel. Moreover, it seems like Rashi also sensed the need to strengthen Israel in knowing our rights to our Promised Land, which is so vital in our time when so many Jews are being influenced by the nations and siding with the 'Palestinian' cause.

The principle of the Jewish people's right to the Land of Israel is so primary, that according to Rashi, the very first verse in the entire Torah comes to clarify this point. May all Jews in Israel and abroad tune into this clear-cut message that Hashem created the entire world for the sake of the Children of Israel keeping the Torah and the Mitzvot in the Land of Israel.