

The Land of Israel in the Parsha & Our Lives

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

Parashat Toldot

Why was Yitzchak's Relationship with the Land of Israel so Special?

When are Jews Permitted to Leave the Holy Land?

I abhor having to leave the land of Israel. Whenever I must go to *Chutz laAretz* (abroad) I cringe inside for leaving my spiritual comfort zone. For me, Israel is not only my home, it is my everything. My soul is entwined with the spirit of the land where I perpetually inhale my spiritual nutrients. Yet, I am not a fanatic. I will leave the land when required. This summer B"H my mother (May she live to 120!) will celebrate her 90-year birthday in Denmark, and of course, my husband and I will be there to honor my mom with our presence. For twenty years (from year 2000 until the coronavirus pandemic) I have been going on my annual international speaking tours to teach Torah and fundraise for Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin. I knew instinctively for such purposes there is no problem leaving the Holy Land. It is indeed permitted to leave the land of Israel to teach Torah and bring people close to mitzvah observance including the mitzvah to live in the land of Israel. Of the three dispensations that the Torah permits a Jew to live in the land of Israel: To find a spouse, for *parnassa* (livelihood), and for Torah study, Rav Melamed teaches that the latter hardly applies today since the majority of Torah scholars nowadays live in Israel. Yet commonly Rabbis are in demand to leave Israel to teach Torah and educate the Jews in the Diaspora to make Aliyah to Israel. This says Rav Melamed is not only permitted but even a mitzvah! (*Peninei Halacha, The Nation and the Land* Chapter 3 Section 9). Thus, I admire my neighbors across the street who recently returned from a 3-months stint at [The Bayit Yehudi, in India](#). They have helped many Jews searching for spirituality in the Far East return safely home. I have a hard time understanding why so many religious residents of Israel choose to leave Israel for vacation. According to the statistics over 4.96 million citizens aged 25 to 59 traveled abroad in 2023 from Israel, this was only a modest increase since the prior year, so therefore not necessarily due to the October 7th war. To give the benefit of the doubt large families save a considerable amount of money by vacationing outside of Israel, as hotels are substantially cheaper in Greece, Cypress, Romania, and the Balkans than anywhere in Israel. Furthermore, the prohibition to leave the land of Israel applies only to a minimum of one month since, when the law was enacted traveling from country to country could take several months (Rav Melamed, *Ibid*). Nevertheless, it is surely a great virtue to remain perpetually in the land the pious should avoid leaving Israel for vacation, because each day, and every moment a Jew stays in the Holy Land he fulfills the mitzvah of living in the land of Israel.

Is it a Mitzvah to Remain in Israel During Challenging Times?

The Sages said, "A person should always dwell in Eretz Yisrael, even in a city inhabited mostly by heathens, and he should not dwell outside the Land, even in a city inhabited mostly by Jews, for anyone who dwells in Eretz Yisrael is like one who has a G-d, and anyone who dwells outside the Land is like one who has no G-d" (Babylonian Talmud, Ketuvot 110b). Based on this sacrifice required by the Talmud for the sake of dwelling in Eretz Yisrael, I would think that for a Torah Jew, it would be worthwhile spending extra on vacation in Israel. For those who can't afford the expense of Glatt Kosher hotels, I can testify that going camping and roasting chicken or fish over a bonfire can be a super meaningful experience for the family. The notion that anyone who lives outside of Israel is as if he doesn't have a G-d is usually not taught to Diaspora Jews. In New York, during *Parashat Lech Lecha* I once shared this quote, mentioned by Rashi on the Parasha, to the great misgiving of all the women present who had never been exposed to this concept (Rashi, *Bereishit* 17:8). Additionally, many of my FFB students (from religious homes) have likewise never heard of such an idea. They even try to deny it by claiming that it can't apply to the many Torah-observant

people who live outside of Israel. I would answer, that according to Ramban, keeping the mitzvot only applies in the land of Israel, keeping them outside of the land is only practice (Ramban, *Vayikra* 18:25). Rambam also emphasizes the virtue of remaining in the Land of Israel despite severe famine. Even when it is permitted to leave *Eretz Yisrael* it is not pious behavior to leave the Holy Land. Thus, G-d punished Elimelech, Machlon, and Kilyon, the greatest men of their generation with untimely death for leaving the Holy Land despite the severe famine in the land. (See *Megillat Ruth* 1:5); Rambam, *Laws of Kings and their Wars* 5:9).

What is the Connection between the Torah's Pun Linking the Red Soup to Esav's Land?

In *Parashat Toldot* Avraham's spiritual heritage which centers around the Land of Israel is apportioned. When Esav sold his birthright for a bowl of very red lentil soup, he forfeited his right to Eretz Yisrael:

ספר בראשית פרק כה פסוק ל

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל יִצְחָק הֲלֵעִיטֵנִי נָא מִן הָאֲדָמָה הַזֶּה כִּי עֵיפִי אָנֹכִי עַל כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמוֹ אֲדָוִם:

“Esav said to Ya’acov, ‘Pour into [me] some of this very red [soup], for I am faint;’ he was therefore named Edom” (*Bereishit* 25:30).

What is the connection between the red (*Adom* in Hebrew) soup and Esav's name: Edom (red)? The color provides a basis for the name Edom given to Esav and his land. The Torah refers to the land settled by Esav and his descendants as the land of Edom (see for example, *Bereishit* 36:16), rather than as the land of Esav. The name, Edom represents how Esav relinquished the right to become Yitzchak's spiritual heir when he sold his birthright. Therefore, he and his descendants do not have a right to the land of Israel. His land is the land of Edom (outside of the Land of Israel). The connection between the red soup and Esav's name Edom thus comes to teach us that through the deal of the red soup the land of Esav's descendants became reduced to the land of Edom. They could therefore have no claim to the land of Israel (Rabbi Bernie Fox, *What's So Important about the Soup?*).

Planting the Shechinah in the Promised Land

In contrast to Esav forfeiting his right to the Land of Israel, *Parashat Toldot* illuminates how Yitzchak, his father steadfastly cleaved to the Holy Land and never separated from it. Even during the famine similar to that in his father's time, Yitzchak did not follow in Avraham's footsteps to go down to Egypt:

ספר בראשית פרק כו פסוק א וַיְהִי רָעַב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הָרָעַב הָרִאשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר הָיָה בְיַמֵּי אַבְרָהָם וַיֵּלֶךְ יִצְחָק אֶל אַבְיִמֶלֶךְ מֶלֶךְ פְּלִשְׁתִּים גְּרָרָה: (ב) וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו הַשֵּׁם וַיֹּאמֶר אֵל תֵּרַד מִצְרַיִם שָׁכֵן בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֵלָי: (ג) גֹּר בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת וְאֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ וְאַבְרַכְךָ כִּי לֹךְ וְלִזְרַעְךָ אֶתְּן אֶת כָּל הָאֲרָצַת הָאֵל וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת הַשְּׂבַע אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִיךָ:

“Then there was a famine in the land, aside from the first famine that had been in the days of Avraham, and Yitzchak went to Avimelech the king of the Philistines, to Gerar. Then Hashem appeared to him, and said, ‘Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land that I will tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and I will bless you, for to you and to your seed will I give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Avraham, your father’” (*Bereishit* 26:1-3).

During the most severe famine in the Land of Israel, Hashem promised Yitzchak that His Divine providence would accompany him and bless him specifically in the Holy Land. Why did G-d expect Yitzchak to remain in Israel despite the famine when He allowed both Avraham and Ya’acov to leave the land? The reason is that Yitzchak was too holy to leave the *kedushah* (holiness) of Eretz Yisrael. His near-death experience at the

Akeida (Binding of Yitzchak) had transformed him into a holy *korban* (sacrifice), just as sacrifices would one day be proscribed outside the Land of Israel (and eventually outside the Temple Mount). Thus, Hashem told Yitzchak, “Do not go down to Egypt.” You are [as] a perfect burnt offering, and being outside the Holy Land is not fitting for you (Rashi, *Bereishit* 26:2 based on *Tanchuma Buber, Toldot* 6; *Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 64:3). While Rashi emphasizes the singular and holy nature of Yitzchak, the Kli Yakar focuses upon Hashem’s Divine Presence linked with the Land of Israel: “It appears likely to me that the reason why Hashem prevented him [Yitzchak] from leaving Eretz Yisrael was because chutz l’aretz (outside the Land of Israel) is no place for the Divine Presence to make itself manifest. If that is the case, Hashem would have been unable [so to speak] to utter His prophetic utterances to Yitzchak regarding pressing matters of the moment. Therefore, Hashem was really telling him: ‘Dwell in the land wherein I manifest My Divine Presence, for therein I will speak to you at any moment I so desire regarding any matter of Prophecy’” (Kli Yakar, *Bereishit* 26:2). Both of these commentaries highlight the holiness of Eretz Yisrael. The fact that Eretz Yisrael is the land wherein the Shechinah dwells is also alluded to in the words that Hashem used to instruct Yitzchak to remain within the land. G-d addressed Yitzchak with the unusual word שָׁכַן/*shechon* rather than its more common synonyms שָׁב/*shev* or גֹּר/*gur* because שָׁכַן/*Shechon* is related to the word שְׁכִינָה/*Shechinah* (Divine Indwelling Presence). As the Midrash elucidates:

מִדְרָשׁ רַבֵּה בְּרֵאשִׁית פֶּרֶשָׁה סֵד פֶּסְקָה ג וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' וַיֹּאמֶר אֵל תֵּרַד מִצְרַיִם שָׁכֹן בְּאֶרֶץ עֵשָׂה שְׂכֹנָה בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל הוּי נוֹטֵעַ הוּי זֹרֵעַ הוּי נֹצֵיב ד' א שָׁכֹן בְּאֶרֶץ שָׁכַן אֶת הַשְּׂכִינָה בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּר בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת:
 “Hashem revealed Himself to him and said, don’t go down to Egypt, dwell (שָׁכַן/*shechon*) in the land.” Make a *shechuna* (neighborhood) in the land of Israel, that is, plant trees and seeds and raise up trees. Another explanation, dwell (*shechon*) in the land; make the Shechinah dwell (*shachen*) in the land, live in his land! (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 64:3).

Yitzchak heeded Hashem’s command and began planting in the land and his work was blessed and yielded fruits:

סֵפֶר בְּרֵאשִׁית פֶּרֶק כו פֶּסוּק יב וַיִּזְרַע יִצְחָק בְּאֶרֶץ הַהוּא וַיִּמְצָא בַשָּׁנָה הַהוּא מֵאָה שְׁעָרִים וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ ה':
 “Then Yitzchak planted in this land, and he found in that year a hundred ears of crop, for Hashem blessed him” (*Bereishit* 26:12).

May we, the descendants of Yitzchak, merit cleaving to the Promised Land and receiving Hashem’s blessings of bounty in the Land. May the following prophecy of trading instruments of war for farming tools be fulfilled in our days “...They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift the sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (*Yesha'yahu* 2:4).