

# The Land of Israel in the Parsha & Our Lives

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha

## Parashat Vayeshev

### How do We Solve the dilemma of Making Aliyah and Caring for Elderly Parents?

#### Are you Permitted to Make Aliyah While Leaving Elderly Parents Behind?

When I made aliyah in 1980 it was the best thing I ever did. It was clearly what I had to do, it was simple, and it was smooth without any conflict. My parents were young and strong and definitely didn't need my help taking care of them. On the contrary, it was a relief for them no longer to have to worry so much about their rebellious teenager. Having just turned 20, I was eager to forge a different life path away from my parents and with enough distance to avoid their constant surveillance. On the other hand, Israel wasn't so far away from my parents' abode in Denmark, so we could still relatively easily visit each other a few times a year and for special occasions. I understand that not everyone has such an ideal situation when making aliyah doesn't conflict with family ties and obligations, which is one of the main justified deterrents from moving permanently to Israel. Making aliyah against a parent's wishes is certainly a huge moral dilemma. I heard about a family who wanted to make aliyah, but they were concerned about leaving their elderly parents behind. They asked their Rabbi, and I was surprised that he advised them against making aliyah for this reason. In my understanding, the mitzvah of honoring parents is vital unless their wishes infringe on the rest of our mitzvah observance. We learn this from "Each person shall revere his mother and his father, but you shall observe my Shabbats" (*Vayikra* 10:3). Our Sages (*Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia* 32a) learned from this verse that honoring parents is never at the expense of other Torah obligations, as the parent is also obligated to carry out the mitzvot (Rashi). The mitzvah of living in the Land of Israel is not only central to keeping the Torah, but it is a Torah command: "You shall possess the Land and settle in it" (*Bamidbar* 33:53). Thus, the mitzvah to live in Israel overrides parental wishes. The question of whether to move to Israel despite parental opposition is subject to a dispute among the *poskim* (halachic authorities). It depends on how we understand the mitzvah of *yishuv ha'aretz* (to settle the land). Rav Moshe Feinstein claims that no obligation exists requiring an individual to pick up and move to Israel. Rather, he classifies this mitzvah as *kiyumit* - one fulfills a mitzvah by moving to Eretz Yisrael, but is not considered as having neglected a mitzvah if he refrains from doing so (*Igrot Moshe*, E.H 1:102). However, the Beit Yehuda (*Yoreh De'ah* 54) follows the Mabit's ruling, that one need not heed his parents' objection to making aliyah. Rav Ovadya Yosef, (*Yechaveh Da'at* 3:69), cites the ruling of the Maharam of Rutenberg (Berlin edition, 28), that given the mitzvah involved in moving to Israel, one may do so even in the face of parental opposition.

#### What is the Halacha Regarding Leaving Eretz Yisrael for Chutz La'aretz (Outside of the Land)?

Rabbi Yochanan said to Rav Asi: It is prohibited. Rav Asi further asked: If one is going to greet his mother, what is the halacha? Rabbi Yochanan said to him: I do not know. Rav Asi waited a little while and then came back to him. Rabbi Yochanan said to him: Asi, you are evidently determined to leave. May the Omnipresent return you in peace, and he said no more (*Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin* 31b).

The Gemara relates that Rabbi Yochanan first tells Rav Asi to return the next day. After assessing Rav Asi's mood, he tells him to go and return in peace. Why did Rabbi Yochanan wait a day before answering? Rav Shaul Yisraeli explains that the mitzvah to live in Eretz Yisrael is called **יָשׁוּב**/*Yishuv* - 'settling.' The mitzvah of settling Eretz Yisrael is to make a life here, rather than just having a physical presence. Thus, when Rabbi Yochanan saw that Rav Asi's mother's well-being was weighing heavily on him, he permitted him to leave Eretz Yisrael for a visit, as he was rather unsettled in Israel unless he could visit his mother

*Amud HaYemani* 22). The decision will ultimately be based on a variety of factors, depending on the reason for the parent's disapproval. Perhaps their disapproval is temporary or based on unwarranted concerns. Perhaps they can be assuaged by frequent visits (*Rabbi Elli Fischer translator, writer, and historian, edits Rav Eliezer Melamed's Peninei Halakha in English*). I personally know many people who made aliyah that visit their parents regularly to honor or care for them. It's not either/or.

### **Who Will the Land Absorb and Who Will it Vomit Out?**

Ya'acov was blessed that honoring his parents and settling in the Land of Israel coincided. *Parashat Vayeshev* begins by offering two reasons for Ya'akov's choice of where to settle in Israel. One is because it was the land of his father's dwelling, his family home. The other is that it was the land of Canaan, as Ibn Ezra highlights, 'the chosen land.'

**ספר בראשית פרק לז פסוק א וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מְגֹרֵי אָבִיו בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:**

"Ya'akov settled in the land, where his father sojourned, in the Land of Canaan" (*Bereishit* 37:1).

What need is there for the seeming repetition about where Ya'acov settled? Ya'acov was drawn to Israel not just because it was the family homestead, but because of its inherent qualities, its uniqueness, and sanctity. Though, unlike his father, Yaakov had been forced by life's circumstances to dwell elsewhere for a period of time, nevertheless, his desire and aspiration were to settle in Eretz Yisrael. When the question of permanence came up not just living a couple of years here or there it was clear to him that it could be only in one place, namely, Eretz Yisrael. This aspect of his relationship with the land stemmed from its holiness and it was independent of the fact that it happened to be where his father dwelled (Rav Menachem Mendel Kasher, *Torah Shelema* quoted by Rabbi Pesach Wolicki). Midrash *Lekach Tov* elaborates on the goodness of the Land of Israel: The Land of Israel called **טוֹבָה/Tovah** – It is "a good and spacious land" (*Shemot* 3:8). It also states, "...this good mountain..." (*Devarim* 3:25). After all, Esav fled from before him, "and he went to a[nother] land, because of his brother Ya'acov (*Bereishit* 36:6). The Land of Israel vomits the wicked, whereas the Land of Israel absorbs the righteous people (*Midrash Lekach Tov (Pesikta Zutra) Bereishit* 36:1). To live in the Holy Land, we need to be a holy people. Just like we choose the Land of Israel as our permanent residence, so does the Promised Land choose the Children of Israel, who keep the Torah. I find it interesting that 90% of aliyah from North America are Torah observant (<https://aish.com/mitzvah-to-live-in-israel/>). The Land absorbs those who want to keep the mitzvot here. Yet, Esav and his descendants, who refuse to keep the Seven Mitzvot of B'nei Noach do not belong in the Holy Land. Due to our long winding exile, the Divine placement has become mixed up. Unfortunately, many Torah-observant Jews are still living outside the Land, while idol-worshipping Christians and Muslim murderers somehow got a foothold in various places of the land of Israel. Yet, we are in the midst of shifting the inhabitants of the Promised Land to coincide with Divine order. Before long, G-dwilling, the land will vomit those who don't belong here, whereas all the exiled Children of Israel will merit returning to settle the land of their Fathers!

### **When Will Our Parents Return Back Home Through Their Children?**

The reason why anyone's parents or any Jew lives outside of Israel today is that this shifting has not yet been completed. We are still awaiting the time when the Children of Israel will live peacefully under the sovereignty of G-d in Torah communities within the Holy Land. We, Ya'acov's descendants are working toward fulfilling the Divine vision of the perfected nation shaping our own destiny in the Holy Land based on our deepest aspirations and ideals of the Torah lifestyle. During all our thousands-year exile, we have never relinquished the dream of return. Wherever we were, we prayed about Israel and facing Israel. Only in Israel does the calendar track the rhythms of the Jewish year. Only in Israel can we fulfill all the mitzvot of the

dependent on the land. Only in Israel is Judaism part of the public square, not just the private, segregated space of synagogue, school, and home. Jews need a land because we are a nation charged with bringing the Divine Presence down to earth in the shared spaces of our collective life. This message, that Jews need a land to create our society and follow the Divine plan, contains a message for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. To Christians and Muslims, it says: you must believe that the G-d of Avraham, grants the children of Avraham the right to the Land that He promised them. To Jews, it says: that very right comes hand-in-hand with a duty to live individually and collectively by the standards of the Torah in justice and compassion, fidelity and generosity, love of neighbor and of the stranger, that alone constitute our mission and destiny: a holy people in the Holy Land (Based on Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Holy People, Holy Land Acharei Mot* • 5771, 5784. The more we settle the land in holiness, the more our parents will follow, as I know so many families whose aging parents made aliyah and came to live with their children to be near their grandchildren and get *nachat* (pleasure) from their great-grandchildren here in Israel. We are living in times when prophecies are being fulfilled “that he may turn the heart of the fathers back through the children, and the heart of the children back through their fathers...” (*Malachi* 3:24).

### **Ya'acov's Return to His Father Goes Hand in Hand with Returning to the Holy Land**

Ya'acov settled in the land where his father lived. This is the fulfillment of his prayer: “If I return in peace to my father's house, and Hashem will be my G-d” (*Bereishit* 28:11). According to Rashbam, Ya'acov wanted to be near his father after a twenty-year exile. He wanted to make restitution for all those years of separation, to support his elderly and sickly father, and also to draw spiritual sustenance from him. Second, he wanted to live where his father lived, to have a sense of rootedness, of tradition, of continuity, and, consequently, a sense of permanence. This was especially important to him after his years of impermanent residence at Lavan's house in Aram, where a visit intended to last a few years became extended to 22 years. Ya'acov's integration between returning to his father's house and returning to the Holy Land is a paradigm for the way of life for his descendants – the Children of Israel. For centuries Jews worldwide prayed and yearned for the day that would herald the possibility of returning to Eretz Israel. If we do not long for the same, we are forsaking the value system of Judaism. The Rambam states: “The great Sages used to kiss the borders of Eretz Israel, kiss its stones, and roll around in its dust” (*Hilchot Melachim* 5:11). He teaches us to develop a love for Eretz Israel. Just as those who came before us kissed its stones and rolled around in its dust, so too must we cultivate that love and yearning (Rabbi Pesach Wolicki). If we remain in exile to care for our parents, then what would prevent our children and children's children from experiencing the same obstacles to making aliyah? Someone must be the first generation to break the pattern. The dilemma regarding leaving parents to make aliyah would never occur in the ideal Torah world. When we all emerge from exile (may it be soon), there will no longer be a conflict between living near our parents and fulfilling the mitzvah of settling the Land of Israel.