



Being a Living Example

Why are Jews enthusiastic about their traditions, but less so about living in their homeland? Turns out, this attitude goes a long way back.

The Jewish Inheritance

Jews take news about Israel personally. We immediately rush to read anything about Israel; if you're listening to the news and the announcer says the word "Israel," you immediately snap to attention. And whenever someone insults or slanders Israel, every Jew takes it personally. For the Jew, Israel may be far from sight, but she is always close to the heart.

In the beginning of the Torah portion of Vaera, where the Torah tells us about the Exodus from Egypt, G-d promises the Jewish People to bring them to the Holy Land, as the verse states, "And I shall bring you to the land upon which I raised My Hand ... and I shall give it to you as an inheritance; I am the L-rd Your G-d" (Shmos 6:8).

There, G-d "swore" that He would give the Land of Israel to every Jew in the form of an "inheritance." (The Torah uses the word: Morasha). Thus, every Jew can claim ownership of the Land of Israel. As the Rebbe would always repeat and stress, the Land doesn't belong only to Israelis who actually live there—rather, it belongs to any Jew, wherever or not one stepped foot on its holy soil. Every Jew has the right to speak out and express an opinion on the Holy Land, because the Land belongs to him or her as much as it belongs to the "Sabra" born in the heart of Tel Aviv.

But the Hebrew word for inheritance, "morashah," appears only one more time in the entire Five Books of Moses, the Chumash, and in connection to something else altogether.

Everyone has heard the popular Jewish children's song, "Torah tzivah lanu Moshe, morashah kehilas Yaakov." It's actually a verse from the

Torah (Devarim 33:4). It's sung in every Jewish kindergarten and every Jewish kid recognizes it.

But why indeed are Jewish kids taught this verse? The Talmud (Tractate Sukkah 42a) tells us: "The Sages taught: A child who can talk is to be taught Torah by his father. What part of Torah? Rabbi Hamnuna said, "Torah tzivah..."

But what is so important about this verse that it needs to be the first one that is taught to Jewish children who have just started to speak?

The answer is the word "morashah"—by teaching them this verse, we are teaching every Jewish child that the Torah is his or her inheritance. We are teaching them that they have ownership on the Torah just as much as any other Jewish kid. We want to drill into them when they are still little that the Torah isn't just for rabbis or religious people—it's for him or her too as much it was for Moshe Rabbeinu himself.

So we have two gifts here—two inheritances that G-d gave us: the Torah, and the Holy Land.

The Key Distinction

But when we look into the matter, we discover something interesting and perhaps even painful. While these two inheritances were given to us at roughly the same time in Jewish history, the "morashah" of the Torah has some attachment to every Jew, even if he is currently not keeping any of the mitzvos of the Torah—still, they have some connection to the Torah and mitzvos, whether it's a bris, sitting Shivah (G-d forbid), saying Kaddish or Yizkor, joining a Seder and eating a bit of matzah one time... there's always some connection. There are always those whose entire connection to the Torah and mitzvos consists of having had a Bar Mitzvah or having lit Chanukah candles once—virtually every Jew has some connection to this morashah, this inheritance.

As for the other morashah, however, the Land of Israel, the exact opposite is the case.

Most of the Jewish Nation, throughout all the generations, had no connection to the Land in a tangible way. Most of the people didn't live in the land and even never visited it. As a matter of fact, there were periods when only a few hundred Jewish families lived in the land. When the Ramban, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (also known as Nachmanides) moved to the Holy Land, he only found two Jews in all of Jerusalem. The millions of Jews alive at the time remained in the

Diaspora.

And when the Rambam, commonly known as Maimonides, visited the Holy Land, in his time there were roughly one thousand Jewish families throughout the entire land. The Rambam quickly discovered that the Holy Land's Jewish community was very small indeed, and so he retreated to Egypt, which was home to a robust and flourishing Jewish community at the time.

As a matter of fact, the more you dig into Jewish history, the more you discover that the quantity of Jews in the Holy Land of Israel throughout two thousand years of exile was always very small—to the extent that historians are always trying to prove that there was always at least a minimum presence of Jews in the Holy Land.

Even during the Second Temple Era, the largest and most established Jewish community was not in the Holy Land but actually in Egypt, in which lived millions of Jews—and not only that, but earlier, when the great Jewish leader Ezra returned to the Holy Land to rebuild the Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple, only 42,000 Jews went up with him. A half-million Jews remained behind in what is now Iraq.

Even today, when it's possible to move to Israel without any serious hassle... when all it takes is a plane ticket and within 12 hours you're in Israel... most Jews still live in the Diaspora. Only 20 percent of American Jews have even visited Israel.

So now we can ask the question: How is it that the fate of our first inheritance, the Torah, is such that almost every Jew feels a connection to it—but not to the second inheritance, the Land of Israel?

When Moshe Rabbeinu came along and told the Jews that G-d wants to give them the Torah, what was their reaction? What did they say? They all reacted with passion, saying, "Everything that G-d said, we will do and we will listen!" (Shmos 24:7). They didn't ask what was in it. They didn't ask how much it costs. They had no questions: "G-d is giving?! We'll take it with both hands!"

On the other hand, when Moshe came along and told the Jews that they were going to the Holy Land, what was their reaction? "Well, we need to send spies to check if the land is good or bad... maybe we should put it off for a bit... right now we don't have time... it's too hot over there... there terrorism there... it's dangerous... there's a drought..." and on and on with excuses.

These two approaches have carried forward to this very day. The way that first generation related to their two gifts from G-d, the way they accepted them, was passed on to their children and to all future generations. To this day, the Torah is accepted passionately, while the Holy Land is greeted with doubts and questions. Why? Because that's how it all started.

So what is the lesson for all of us?

I once spoke to Hebrew School students about the mitzvah of eating matzah. I heard one kid say, "I love matzah!" Immediately, another kid commented, "Matzah's no good!" I asked the other kid, "How do you know that matzah's no good?" She answered him: "My mommy told me that it gives you a stomach ache."

My friends, our precious children are deeply affected by the attitudes of their parents—more so than by anything else. If there are mitzvos that you love and mitzvos that make you happy, there's a high chance that your kids will also love those mitzvos and find happiness in them too. But mitzvos that you do with a sour face, there's a high likelihood that your kids won't keep them at all.

This week we begin reading Vayikra – the book of sacrifices. It's a very hard book to learn and enjoy. Coming from the books of Genesis, and Exodus, which everyone enjoys learning because of the stories, we now enter a very technical Book. The parent's attitude towards the learning of these difficult Parshas, will rub off on the children.

Recently, there was a video clip on the Living Torah video of a Jewish man coming by the Rebbe for a blessing for his three year-old son. The man wanted a blessing that his son grow up to be a good Chosid and a scholar. The Rebbe told him: "You need to show him how to do it. He can't become those things through his own power—but if that's what you are, that's what he will be."