

THIS LAND IS MY LAND (AND OUR LAND)

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Parshas Lech Lecha

This Land Is My Land (and Our Land)

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Sponsored by Harold and Gilla Saltzman on the yahrtzeit of his mother, Rebecca Saltzman (Rivka Rachel bas Yehuda Leib a"h)

Today's Learning: Nach: Shoftim 7-8 Mishnah: Midot 3:8-4:1 Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yevamot 28 Halachah: Mishnah Berurah 488:3-489:2

In this week's parashah, we read that Hashem promised Eretz Yisrael to Avraham's descendants. In Divrei Hayamim I (16:16-19--recited every day in the Hodu prayer), we read similarly, "That He covenanted with Avraham, and His oath to Yitzchak . . . saying, 'To you [singular] I shall give the Land of Canaan, the lot of your [plural] heritage.' When you were but few in number, hardly dwelling there." R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865- 1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) comments on these verses:

Eretz Yisrael is suitable for the Congregation of Yisrael as a whole, in all generations, forever and ever, yet it also is suitable for every individual Jew according to his nature, his needs, and his essence. This fit is precise, for it was measured out by Hashem, who gave His beloved Land to His holy people. This is why the verse begins in the singular--"To you [singular] I shall give the Land of Canaan"--and ends in the plural--"The lot of your [plural] heritage."

Regarding the verse, "When you were but few in number, hardly dwelling there," R' Kook writes: The tie between Yisrael and its Holy Land is not like the natural tie that connects other nations to their lands. Generally, a connection between a nation and its land develops over time based on events that happen there and continued expansion and building as a result of population growth. This is not true in the case of the Divinely-ordained connection between the Congregation of Yisrael and the holiness of the Beloved Land. Even when we were few in number [i.e., Avraham and Sarah alone], there already was a special connection between our nation and its land. (Olat Re'iyah p.203)

"After these events, the word of Hashem came to Avram in a vision saying, 'Do not fear, Avram, I am a shield for you; your reward is very great'." (15:1)

Rashi z"l explains: After Avram (Avraham) miraculously defeated the four kings, he was very anxious. He said, "Perhaps through this G-d-given victory, I have already received reward for all my good deeds." Therefore, the Omnipresent said to him, "Do not fear, Avram, . . . your reward is very great."

R' Yaakov Meshulam Orenstein z"l (1770-1839; rabbi of Lvov, Poland) writes: The Midrash Rabbah comments on the phrase in our verse, "I am a shield for you"--"*Everyone knows* that I am a shield for you; therefore, your reward is very great." He explains: Our Sages teach that a person should not pray for a miracle because, if a miracle is performed for him, he may have to "pay" for it from his "account" of accumulated merits. However, writes R' Orenstein, that is true only if the miracle that is performed is a private, hidden miracle. If a miracle is performed publicly and G-d's Name is sanctified thereby, the merit that the individual earns from being a vehicle for the sanctification of Gd's Name counter-balances what he has to "pay" for that miracle.

That, concludes R' Orenstein, is what the midrash means. Because everyone knows that I (Hashem) protected you (Avraham), because it is obvious that a miracle occurred when one man defeated four mighty kings, you need not worry that you have used up any of your future reward. Rather, your reward is very great. (Quoted in Pardes Yosef Ha'chadash: Chanukah p.484)

"Your reward is very great . . . What will You give me?" (15:1-2)

Avraham Avinu seems to asking, "Of what use is a reward if I have no child to leave it to?" Why did Avraham ask this? Perhaps Hashem was promising Avraham great reward in Olam Ha'neshamot / the "World of Souls" (what we commonly, but imprecisely, refer to as "Gan Eden" or "Olam Haba")!

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; 1194-1270) explains: Avraham did not understand Hashem's promise to refer to reward in Olam Ha'neshamot, because the existence of such reward is obvious and requires no promise. Since our souls are not corporeal or physical, it is obvious that they do not die with the body, but rather live forever.

For the same reason, Ramban writes, the existence of Olam Ha'neshamot is not mentioned anywhere in the Torah; one can logically deduce that such a world exists. Rather, the Torah focuses on non-obvious, seemingly unnatural consequences, for example, that rain will fall if we serve Hashem or that a person will become wealthy if he gives ma'asrot / tithes properly. (Derashat Torat Hashem Temimah)

"On that day Hashem made a covenant with Avram, saying, 'To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River'." (15:18)

"When Avram was ninety-nine years old, Hashem appeared to Avram and said to him, 'I am Kel Shakkai. Walk before Me and be perfect. I will set My covenant between Me and you, and I will increase you very, very much'." (17:1-2)

R' Leib Mintzberg shlita (Yerushalayim) asks: Why did Hashem make two covenants with Avram/Avraham separated by many years? Why wasn't one covenant enough? He explains: The Jewish People's reason for existence has two aspects, each of which is represented by one of these covenants.

First, the Jewish People are mankind's representatives to serve Hashem. Because Hashem created the world, all creations are obligated to honor and serve Him, their Master. However, Hashem selected the Jewish People to be a nation of kohanim / priests to serve him on behalf of all of mankind.

Second, the Jewish People in their own right, not just as representatives of all of Creation, have found favor in Hashem's eyes. Hashem views us as His relatives, his children. Because of this, Hashem pays special attention ("hashgachah") to us and provides us with special blessings. It is because of this, as well, that He gave us the opportunity, as well as the obligation, to receive the Torah. This requires a higher level of service from us, more than just being good people.

The beginning of our parashah speaks of the first relationship. Thus, for instance, it refers to "the souls they made in Charan" (12:5), which our Sages understood to mean "converts." This describes Avraham in his role vis- à-vis the world. Similarly, the Gemara (Berachot 7b) notes that Avraham was the first person in history to address G-d as "Master." In this passage, Avraham is reaching out to the world and is compared to the world's other inhabitants. When Avraham takes an oath in the first half of our parashah, it is to "the Creator of heaven and earth" (14:22). The promise that is made to Avraham at the beginning of this parashah is, "I will make of you a great nation" (12:2)--a "nation" among other nations, a player on the world's stage.

At the time of the second covenant, however, the covenant (brit) of milah (circumcision), Avraham is told, "Walk before Me and be perfect." The relationship is between Avraham and Hashem. No one else in the world is mentioned. And, the promise that is made to Avraham at this time is, "I will increase you very, very much." Hashem said further: "I will ratify My covenant between Me and you and between your offspring after you, throughout their generations, as an everlasting covenant, to be a G-d to you and to your offspring after you" (17:7)--not a covenant with a nation, but rather with a family. (Ben Melech: Shir Ha'shirim p.20)

Shemittah

We continue our historical overview of the controversy surrounding the "hetter mechirah," the sale of the Land of Israel to a non-Jew for the shemittah year. Last week we presented excerpts from the ruling of R' Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor z"l of Kovno that the land of Eretz Yisrael could be sold to a non-Jew prior to the shemittah of 5649 / 1888-89, and that certain work on the Land thereby could continue during the shemittah. That ruling was issued at the request of confidants of Baron Edmund de Rothschild, who was financing several of Eretz Yisrael's nascent agricultural settlements. Here we present excerpts from a letter opposing R' Spektor's ruling signed by twenty of the leading Ashkenazic rabbis of Yerushalayim.

Behold the seventh year, 5649 since Creation, is drawing close--the shemittah year according to Rambam [and most, but not all, other authorities, as will be discussed in a future issue] . . . In our day, some of our brethren among Bnei Yisrael have merited to own land in Eretz Yisrael, to work it and guard it [paraphrasing Bereishit 2:15], and to observe the agricultural laws. Not long ago, some prominent men among the Jewish People also bought land and gave it to hundreds of souls, and Hashem's Will has been that they succeed. How fortunate they are! Now, these settlers who are meticulous in performing G-d's word are rejoicing at the approach of the seventh year, the shemittah year, when they will merit to fulfill the mitzvah that the Torah commanded us to refrain from working the earth . . . Each of these workers of the earth of the Holy Land, keepers of the faith, will throw down their spades and plows, and their hearts are ready to trust in Hashem, for He gives grain, wine and oil. . . However, we have heard that some people don't approve of this. They say, "Who will support us, and from where will assistance come, if we don't work the land in the seventh year, and the land is left desolate?" They have sought permission to nullify G-d's commandment and they have used terrible means to accomplish their desires, misleading the great rabbis of the Diaspora into nullifying G-d's command by telling them that it is a matter of life and death and that the existence of the settlements depends on it. That is not true! To the contrary, not only is it not matter of life and death or of the destruction of the settlements, observing the shemittah will be good for the settlements and the land, as has been verified. . . Therefore, one who fears the word of G-d should not rely on those who permit this. . . (Nachshonei Ha'shemittah p.111)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Torah.org](https://www.torah.org) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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