

NO, ISRAEL IS NOT FOR SALE

by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene

The Mitzvah:

There is a mitzvah that the ancestral portion of the Israelites, divided among the Tribes in the Land of Israel cannot be sold forever (Leviticus 25:23).

By prohibiting selling the land indefinitely, the Jew cannot escape how, whatever his perspective, the land is never truly his. Whether working, buying or selling the land, it is divinely conditioned and regulated. So there are the laws of shemittah, the Sabbatical year where all land must remain fallow (Leviticus 25:4) and yovel, the Jubilee year when all transactions (and Jewish slaves) revert back to their former state and ownership (Leviticus 25:10).

This means that the Jewish nation do not have full jurisdiction over the land - it is simply not theirs, to do whatever they desire with no strings attached.

As promised to Avraham, G-d gave this land as the homeland of the Jewish people (Genesis 15:7). Of course, as Master of the Universe, every portion of land is His. So, there is no denying how, ultimately, the "land belongs to Me" (Leviticus 25:23). Actually, the counter-argument to the gentile nations' accusation of the Jewish people invading the land after entering from the wilderness, points to the Torah's account of the genesis. "The universe is His, and He can grant this land to whoever He so wishes" (Genesis 1:1).

The Jewish nation can draw closer to its Master through the correct relationship with this land. It is the most exalted land on Earth, wherein the Temple stood, a land that is privy to an extra dimension of divine providence where G-d's eyes rest from the beginning until the end of the year (Deuteronomy 11:12). Within this land there is a greater propensity to draw closer to G-d.

That a permanent sale cannot be reached should not be a cause for concern. Rather, the property owner should liken himself to a tenant renting out the land from the ultimate Landlord: G-d. They are, in effect, "strangers and residents with Him" (Leviticus 25:23).

To be worthy and deserving of residence in this land, it is imperative that the inhabitants conduct themselves accordingly. Their portion is one of holiness, of spirituality, of G-dliness. Where they live up to this exalted level, they are in touch with the symbolism of the land. Where they tap into its sacred soil, they can further their relationship to G-d.

Only if they pay their dues, namely if they live a life of Torah and mitzvos, is the King willing to allow

these lands to attributed to them and called in their name. Only then can it be truly called "Eretz Yisrael, the Land of [the Children of] Israel". But if not, and indeed when they historically failed to live as their commitment, when they failed to observe the shemittah of the land (Leviticus 26:34); then, they were mercilessly driven out of their homeland into exile.

This land, like the human body, is ours as a custodian. To be sure, both corporeal entities have to be imbued with sanctity. Wary that this is not a permanent state, both must be propelled in the commitment to serving G-d because everything - including the land - is His. Nor does he want to sell or relinquish his portion in the land and nation of Israel and developing an eternal relationship with G-d. Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene and **Torah.org**.