



TORAT ERETZ YISRAEL AND THE VISION OF A JEWISH STATE

We are told in the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 16:4) that אין תורה כְּתוּרַת אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל, “there is no Torah like the Torah of the Land of Israel.” In what sense is the Torah studied and taught within the confines of the Land of Israel meaningfully distinct from the Torah of other locales? Did G-d not give one single Torah to the entire Jewish people?¹

With the birth of the State of Israel 73 years ago, *Torat Eretz Yisrael* took on a whole new meaning, or, better yet, a renewal of a meaning that had been fossilized. As Rav Soloveitchik described in remarks delivered on June 12, 1967 before the RCA, “In the last 2000 years, the Jewish people played no role in the historical arena. Now, the great miracle has happened, that our people somehow emerged from the shadows, from anonymity, and are now in the center of the universal stage.” The Jewish people finds itself today not as a small, minority community dispersed across the earth. Rather, we are now an independent, sovereign nation, bound together by a shared destiny, and a full-fledged member of the family of nations.

What does the return to sovereignty mean for *Torat Hashem* and for the observant Jew, as we build not just a state for Jews, but a Jewish State? Torah now has a renewed responsibility to deal with a government and an army, and the repercussions of such power. We need to discuss how Shabbat and *Chagim* look in the public sphere – how we operate our hospitals, army bases, power plants and recreational spaces. We must ensure that religion is not a political tool of the few but a portal of ethical and spiritual entry

for the many in light of our country’s religious diversity. We need to remove 2,000 years of dust from the texts that discuss the moral and religious guidelines that must inspire our national policies in areas such as the plight of asylum seekers, the needs of migrant workers, and national support for those who suffer economically. We need to courageously muster *halacha* and the judiciary system on both the local and international levels to end the scourge of the *agunah* crisis. And as citizens of a state that is both Jewish and democratic, we must explore the halachic principles that can and should guide us in fairly engaging the minority populations who live among us, particularly with those who pledge allegiance to this country and even serve in our armed forces.

The purview of *Torat Eretz Yisrael* is not limited to what happens within our national borders. With more nations ready to establish bilateral relations with Israel, and with governments and regimes the world over committing atrocities against their own populations and those of their foes, how will we be guided by the Torah’s eschatological vision of a lasting, harmonious world peace? Perhaps like no other time in history, we can explore the role the Jewish State should play in facilitating and advancing a more just and equitable world order. These questions and so many more are what make *Torat Eretz Yisrael* unique, rich and expansive. And by engaging in these issues, the Jewish people are propelled onto the world stage, with the opportunity to make a global impact.

We are taught that as Rabbi Akiva was martyred, a key moment of defeat

marking the fall of the Second Commonwealth, the letters of the Torah ascended toward heaven. With sovereignty lost, elements of the Torah itself became inapplicable, and were sent into heavenly exile to await our people’s return. Today, *Torat Eretz Yisrael* is the recognition that only in *Medinat Yisrael* does Torah have the capacity to fully engage the private, communal and global arenas of Jewish life and outlook. Here in Israel, we have the opportunity and ability to restore the Torah to its rightful prominence.

The Torah is no longer orphaned from its engagement with the rest of the global community. Today’s *Torat Eretz Yisrael* has the capacity to be holistic and visionary, confidently confronting the needs of *Am Yisrael* in its own sovereign state. It is a calling to forsake neither our ancient traditions nor the ever-changing realities around us, but to find the interconnectivity between them. This is the Torah of *Eretz Yisrael!* May we merit to study it, to teach it and to bring it to life.

1 In addition to the contemporary idea I will be suggesting, there are many other interpretations of this statement including Rav Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter of Gur (Sefat Emet, Beshalach 5656) concerning the development of *Mitzvot Hatluyot BaAretz*, and others who point out the differences in the paradigmatic construction of the Jerusalem Talmud vs. Babylonian Talmud.

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