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## **Summary of Thesis:**

### **Eretz Yisrael in the Thoughts of Halevi, Nahmanides and Rav Kook**

This thesis is an analysis of the views of Yehuda Halevi, Nahmanides and Rav Kook as they pertain to the role of Eretz Yisrael in enhancing the status of the Jewish people and the practice of Judaism. The purpose of this thesis is to compare and contrast three of Judaism's great thinkers in order to determine the place and priority of Eretz Yisrael in Jewish life. This examination explores the benefits attained by those who live in the Land of Israel. Such benefits include their spiritual connection to G-d, their observance of mitzvot, and their connection to the Jewish people. In addition, the importance of Israel in the writings of these scholars is explored in a modern context to determine whether or how Israel could be relevant for liberal Jews.

This thesis contains five chapters which include an introduction and a conclusion and one chapter for each of the three thinkers. For the Yehuda Halevi chapter I utilized The Kuzari. In the Nahmanides chapter I utilized his commentaries of the Torah text. And finally, for Rav Kook I examined his work, Orot Me-Ofel.

The goal of this thesis is to cause, through the study of these great thinkers, Jews today to begin to recognize the spiritual importance of Eretz Yisrael to our Jewish souls, to the Jewish people and to our observance of Judaism. My hope is that the contribution of my thesis reintroduces these great Jewish thinkers into a modern day debate over Jewish practice in general, and Zionism in particular.

Eretz Yisrael in the Thoughts of Halevi, Nahmanides and Rav Kook

Erica Burech

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## **Introduction**

This thesis is an analysis of the views of Yehuda Halevi, Nahmanides and Rav Kook as they pertain to the role of Eretz Yisrael in enhancing the status of the Jewish people and the practice of Judaism. The purpose of this thesis is to compare and contrast three of Judaism's great thinkers in order to determine the place and priority of Eretz Yisrael in Jewish life. This examination explores the benefits attained by those who live in the Land of Israel. Such benefits include their spiritual connection to G-d, their observance of mitzvot, and their connection to the Jewish people. In the concluding chapter, the importance of Israel in the writings of these scholars will be explored in a modern context to determine whether or how Israel could be relevant for liberal Jews.

Yehuda b. Samuel Halevi, born around 1080 in Toleda, Spain, is famous for his poetry and philosophy. He studied Talmud at Lucena College with the prominent Isaac Alfasi. He was accepted into court circles in Cordova where he went on to practice medicine. During the Middle Ages, Aristotelian philosophy threatened the intellectuals, but this did not deter Halevi from making his stand against this philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

His work The Kuzari, which he wrote in Arabic in 1140, strongly confronts Christianity, Islam, and particularly Karaism since these groups had come together to damage Rabbinic Judaism. The

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<sup>1</sup> Hallevi, Judah., Book of Kuzari. trans., from Arabic by Hartwig Hirschfeld., Pardes Publishing House, Inc., New York. 1946. P. i.

Kuzari is characteristically apologetic and its purpose is to defend the Jewish Faith.<sup>2</sup>

Once Halevi had completed writing The Kuzari, he was determined to live the remainder of his life in Eretz Yisrael. There is a legend that when he finally fulfilled his dream and arrived in Jerusalem, an Arab horseman killed him with a spear while he was reciting the words of his poem, The Longing For Zion.<sup>3</sup>

I will explore passages of The Kuzari which deal specifically with his view of the value of Eretz Yisrael upon the Jewish people and the observance of Judaism.

A rabbi and a scholar, Moses b. Nahman, 1194-1270, also known as RaMBaN and Nahmanides, was born in Gerona, Catalonia. During the Middle Ages, he was one of the eminent authors of talmudic literature. He was also a famous philosopher, kabbalist, biblical exegete, poet, and physician. In Catalonia, Ramban served as chief rabbi until he was forced to emigrate to Eretz Yisrael. Nahmanides was called to trial by the Dominicans for his supposed damaging writings against Christianity. The king, who had promised him freedom of speech and knew that the Bishop had requested that Nahmanides write his controversial thoughts, extricated him from the trial. However, the Dominicans were not pleased and Nahmanides almost did not make it out of Spain to Eretz Yisrael.<sup>4</sup>

He did successfully emigrate to Israel, where he added to his commentary on the Torah. Nahmanides' interpretations of the Bible

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Encyclopaedia Judaica. Keter Publishing House., Jerusalem. pg. 774-776.

convey his thoughts regarding G-d, the Torah, Israel and the world.<sup>5</sup> I will discuss several of Nahmanides' biblical interpretations which deal with his view of Eretz Yisrael.

Rav Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook, (1865-1935), was born in Grieve, Latvia, to an observant and educated Jewish family. He experienced life in the restricted Jewish ghetto in Eastern Europe. In addition to being a prolific writer, he was the rabbi to Jews in the Lithuanian towns of Zoimel (1888-1895) and Boisk (1895-1904). During World War I, he served as a rabbi for a congregation in London, England (1917-1918). The ultimate rabbinic position which he held, for sixteen years until his death, was as the chief rabbi of Jerusalem, and the entire Jewish community in Palestine.<sup>6</sup> During the period of the Second Aliyah, Rav Kook was Eretz Yisrael's first chief rabbi and one of the Jewish community's most eminent leaders.<sup>7</sup>

Rav Kook was responsible for building the foundation of religious Zionism and was a respected authority for spiritual and halachic matters.<sup>8</sup> He was motivated to find "the holy sparks"<sup>9</sup> in

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 777.

<sup>6</sup> Abraham Isaac Kook: The Lights of Penitence, The Moral Principles, Lights of Holiness, Essays, Letters, and Poems. Tran. & Intro., Ben Zion Bokser. Preface., Jacob Agus & Rivka Schatz., Paulist Press, New York. 1978. p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Ish-Shalom, Benjamin., Rav Avraham Itzhak HaCohen Kook: Between Rationalism and Mysticism. Trans., from Hebrew by Ora Wiskind-Elper., State University of New York Press, Albany., 1993. p. ix.

<sup>8</sup> Abraham Isaac Kook: The Lights of Penitence, The Moral Principles, Lights of Holiness, Essays, Letters, and Poems. p. xi.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. xiii.



every ideology, not just that of Orthodox Judaism, but also of secular and liberal Judaism. He gave voices to all of the Chalutzeem in Eretz Yisrael. Rav Kook shared Yehuda Halevi's belief that the modern Zionist movement would renew prophecy and enhance the Jewish people and the observance of Judaism, and perhaps ultimately bring about messianic redemption.<sup>10</sup>

In this thesis, I explore Rav Kook's work entitled Orot Me-Ofel, which includes a collection of poetic essays regarding how Eretz Yisrael fits into his philosophy of Judaism.

I thank the following people whose assistance with this work gave me strength, confidence and taught me quite a bit. My husband Craig who is my editor and my bahshare't. Thank you for your tireless editing and for sharing my struggle. Thank you to Dr. Leonard Kravitz, my New York thesis advisor. Our weekly conversations were a wonderful and personal way for me to truly understand the thoughts and teachings of Halevi and Nahmanides. Your passion for these thinkers really moves me. My gratitude is also extended to Dr. Stanley Chyet, my Los Angeles thesis advisor. Our Tuesday meetings were such a delight. You are a true mensche, and I thank you for all of your help with Rav Kook. Thank you also to Krista and Yafa from Hebrew Union College's Los Angeles Library. I appreciate all of your help in getting the resources which I needed for this work. Of course, I would not even be here writing this thesis if it were not for my parents, Stan and Linda Burech. Thank you for your encouragement and belief in me. You have always stood by me and supported me through my struggles and through my decisions.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

The creation of this work was difficult, since I am passionate about the topic of Israel. Despite my feelings of angst, the writing was an enjoyable process because of the people whom I was blessed to work with.

The reason I chose this topic is because I personally struggle with where Israel fits into my life as a liberal Jew. I have had many Israel experiences and feel most connected to G-d, to the mitzvot and to the Jewish people when I am living in Eretz Yisrael. However, I know that I could lead a fulfilling life here in the United States as a liberal Jew working as a rabbi. Additionally, the Israeli economy pales in comparison to the standard of living available in the United States. Of course, I want to be able to provide my future children with a wonderful life filled with great opportunities, and this costs money. I know that if I remain here in the States I will teach Hebrew, the spoken language in Israel, and will encourage people to spend some significant time in Israel. Conversely, I could teach Hebrew and the values of Israel in the Land itself, and personally feel much more connected to Judaism than I do in America. As a rabbi and an observant Jew, I am certain that I will long to return to Israel while living in the United States. Yet, if I make aliyah perhaps I will mourn the good and easy economical life I gave up in the U.S. when I am stressing to make ends meet in Israel. What Israel lacks in monetary wealth, however, it compensates for in a rich spiritual life. This is my struggle. I hope that this thesis brings clarity to my life and to others who share my struggle.



## Yehuda Halevi

According to Halevi, the Jewish people will experience ultimate preeminence with the renewal of nationalism. He expresses pride in Jewish blood and believes that national preservation will strengthen observance of Jewish traditions and Jewish values. However, Halevi recognizes the fact that individual Jews are extremely successful in the Diaspora and are often unwilling to separate themselves from their business and their homes.<sup>11</sup>

The Divinity was prepared to settle [in the Second Temple] as it had previously [in the first Temple], provided that the Jewish people would all agree to return to Israel eagerly. Instead, only some returned, while the majority--including the important leaders--remained in Babylon. They preferred the subservience in the Diaspora, so that they would not have to part from their homes and affairs.<sup>12</sup>

The Rabbi in Halevi's *Kuzari* makes a suggestion which requires some analysis. The Rabbi dramatically states that Divine Providence was ready to restore the miserable state of affairs of the Jews to the way they had been during the time of the first Temple. The Rabbi states what was required of the Jews in order to receive this Divine status. However, there appears to be two distinct requirements: one physical and one mental. It is unclear if either was more important than the

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11 Halevi, Rabbi Yehuda. *Kuzari*: Abridged edition with an introduction and a commentary by Isaak Heinemann, in *Three Jewish Philosophers*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1969. p. 24-25.

12 *Kuzari*. II:24.

other in achieving salvation. The Rabbi states that Divinity was at hand provided that the Jewish people would "all" willingly consent to return to Israel "eagerly." The construction of this sentence indicates that the first requirement was the physical one, requiring that a certain physical number of Jews, in this case all, and not merely some, return. The second requirement was the mental or emotional requirement that this undertaking not be done unwillingly, or even with some degree of reservation, but rather "eagerly." At first, it appears as though the physical requirement that all return is more important, for the Rabbi states, "instead, only some returned, while the majority--including the important leaders--remained in Babylon."<sup>13</sup> Here, the focus is on the number who returned ("only some") and even on the quality of those that returned versus the quality of those that stayed behind. However, it seems clear that Halevi intended to focus on both requirements as necessary components to receiving G-d's Divine status. Later in the same passage, the Rabbi states, "Were we prepared to meet the G-d of our forefathers with a pure mind, we should find the same salvation as our fathers did in Egypt."<sup>14</sup> In this example, the Rabbi emphasizes the mental or emotional requirement of receiving G-d with a "pure mind" as essential to meriting G-d's salvation.

The Rabbi's anguished reference to the important leaders who remained in Babylon "so that they would not have to part from their homes and affairs" perhaps reminds us that economic interest as a motive to living in the Galut is first recorded in Num. 32. Here the

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<sup>13</sup> Kuzari. II:24.

<sup>14</sup> Kuzari. II:24.

children of Reuven and the children of Gad told Moses that they preferred to be given land outside of Israel which was good for raising cattle than to cross the Jordan and enter the Land of Israel.

Now the children of Reuven and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle: and when they saw the land of Yazer, and the land of Gilad, that, behold, the place was a place for cattle; the children of Gad and the children of Reuven came and spoke to Moshe . . . saying . . . the country which the Lord smote before the congregation of Yisrael, is a land for cattle, and thy servants have cattle: and they said, if we have found favour in thy sight, let this land be given to thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over the Yarden.<sup>15</sup>

Halevi expresses anguish that the Jewish nation comfortably settles in the Diaspora without any remorse or feelings of being pulled towards that land where the divine plan calls for us to settle. He claims that a connection exists between the revival of Judaism as a religion and as a people. This paradigm defines Halevi's nationalism where the nation and the faith of Israel coexist; one component cannot survive without the other.<sup>16</sup> For Halevi, Jerusalem will be rebuilt and the Jewish people and religion will be strengthened when Jews "yearn for it to the ultimate degree, to the point where they favor its stones and dust."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Numbers 32.

<sup>16</sup> Halevi, Rabbi Yehuda. *Kuzari*: Abridged edition with an introduction and a commentary by Isaak Heinemann, in *Three Jewish Philosophers*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1969. p. 22-23.

<sup>17</sup> *Kuzari*. V:27.

Halevi believes that we as Jews dwell in the Galut in order to arouse within us a deep longing for Eretz Yisrael.<sup>18</sup> "When people become aroused to live in this holy place and to press for the anticipated event, this, too, generates great reward."<sup>19</sup> This notion has perhaps been a source of frustration for Halevi since he has commented on the ambivalent feelings of Jews living in Galut towards Israel.<sup>20</sup> Obviously, one cannot long to live in a place where one already resides. Only one living outside of Israel can "press for the anticipated event" of one day living in Israel. This anticipation, concedes Halevi, is rewarding. It is therefore interesting to note that Halevi acknowledges an intrinsic benefit to living in the Galut which cannot be obtained by being born and raised in Israel. Although Halevi suggests such a benefit, it is clear that he considers living in Eretz Yisrael even more beneficial.

The Rabbi of Halevi's Kuzari conveys the distinctiveness of Eretz Yisrael:

It should not be difficult to understand how one land can be more distinguished than others. You yourself see how one place produces a certain type of plant more successfully than other places. . . . You see how the inhabitants of one particular region are distinguished from others in their appearance and behavior. [Therefore, one can also see how one region is more prone to spirituality than another].<sup>21</sup>

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18 Heinemann, p. 22. "It is only in Palestine that Jewish culture can open out again in full glory."

19 Kuzari. V:27.

20 "They preferred the subservience in the Diaspora, so that they would not have to part from their homes and affairs." Kuzari. II:24.

21 Kuzari. II:10.

Halevi strives to provide a rationale for Israel's place and function. Halevi does this in the context of establishing Israel's unique spirituality. Observance of Jewish ritual and commandments, decreed by G-d, serve the practical purpose of achieving living contact with G-d. Jewish ritual and commandments are akin to a comparable religious pre-eminence which inhabits Israel, and similar morality which exists in the Hebrew language.<sup>22</sup> Halevi provides an analogy between vines and the Jewish religion whereby just as certain priceless vines can only grow in a specific place through particular cultivation, so too only the Jewish people can grow spiritually if properly cultivated in the soil of Israel.<sup>23</sup>

The Jewish people living in Eretz Yisrael, conversing in Hebrew and performing G-d's commandments define the prophetic experience for Halevi. For prophecy to occur each of these three factors are vital and solely these components will bring about prophecy. Therefore, only members of the Jewish people can witness the prophetic experience, which can only occur in Israel and will only be conveyed and understood in Hebrew.<sup>24</sup>

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22 Halevi Judah, The Kuzari: An Argument for the Faith of Israel, translated from Arabic Hartwig Hirschfeld, introduction by H. Slonimsky, New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1964. p.28-30.

23 Kravitz, Leonard. "Israel and the Diaspora: Sacred And Profane," in Israel and The Diaspora in Jewish Law: Essays and Responsa, edited by Walter Jacob and Moshe Zemer, Pittsburgh: Rodef Shalom Press, 1997. p. 13.

24 Silman, Yochanan. Philosopher and Prophet: Judah Halevi the Kuzari, and the Evolution of His Thought, translated from the Hebrew by Lenn J. Schramm. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995. p.178-179. Directly or indirectly



G-d is called the 'G-d of Israel' because the Divine vision did not exist in any other nation. He is called the 'G-d of the land' [of Israel] because Israel possesses a special power within its air and soil -and even the heavens above the land -to bring rise to prophecy, when coupled with the other factors which are like working the soil and the key to this people's success.<sup>25</sup>

Halevi discusses a correlation between prophecy and living in Eretz Yisrael. For Halevi, the Land is essential for prophecy to occur, inferring that prophecy cannot take place without somehow involving the Land of Israel. Indeed, in The Kuzari, the Rabbi states, "Whosoever prophesied did so either in the [Holy] Land, or concerning it. . . ." <sup>26</sup> In essence, Halevi is arguing that if one takes away the Land of Israel, one negates the possibility of prophecy.

Halevi's dedication to Israel resonates within his various works where he truly sanctifies Zion, e.g. his poetry. Perhaps the book concludes with Halevi's determination which is reflected in his poetry. Ultimately, The Kuzari concludes with the Chaver's determination to leave the land of the Khazars in order to live in Jerusalem. The fervent praises which Jerusalem receives within Halevi's poetry gives us insight into his strong desire to go to Eretz Yisrael.<sup>27</sup>

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participating in a prophetic experience influences all the factors included in this experience.

<sup>25</sup> Kuzari. IV:17.

<sup>26</sup> Kuzari. II:14.

<sup>27</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, Dan. Medieval Jewish Philosophy: An Introduction. Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996. p.64. "G-d utilizes Israel to insure the survival of the Jewish people."



If only I could roam through those places where G-d was revealed to your prophets and heralds! . . . I would bow down, my face on your ground; I would love your stones; your dust would move me to pity. . . The air of your land is the very life of the soul, the grains of your dust are flowing myrrh, your rivers are honey from the comb. It would delight my heart to walk naked and barefoot among the desolate ruins where your shrines once stood; where your Ark was hidden away.<sup>28</sup>

Halevi's yearning for the Land of Israel is expressed here as a true love poem. Halevi uses such words and phrases as "delight my heart," "love," and "naked and barefoot." These words, carefully chosen, are those of a long-distance lover anticipating a joyous reunion. Such is the passion Halevi feels for the Land of Israel.

What is the purpose of emigration to Israel? The King raises this very point, challenging the Rabbi:

Closeness to G-d can be achieved in any place, with a good heart and strong desire. Why, then should you place yourself in danger from deserts, oceans and various hostile people?<sup>29</sup>

Here, the King not only draws attention to the harsh living conditions present in Israel, but also raises a legitimate religious/spiritual issue. If closeness to G-d can be achieved in any place then why go to Israel? The Rabbi answers this question:

As regards the invisible and spiritual *Shechinah*, it is with every born Israelite of virtuous life, pure heart, and

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<sup>28</sup> Halevi, *The Longing for Zion*, p.4-5.

<sup>29</sup> Kuzari. V:22.

upright mind before the Lord of Israel. Palestine is especially distinguished by the Lord of Israel, and no function can be perfect except there. Many of the Israelitish laws do not concern those who do not live there . . .<sup>30</sup>

The Rabbi argues that because G-d especially distinguished the Land of Israel, it is only there where certain actions can be deemed perfect. Finally, the Rabbi makes a very practical argument, stating that many of the commandments deal with the Land of Israel, and can only be upheld there. Halevi affirms that the true authentic observance of the divine commandment can only transpire in Israel.<sup>31</sup> To live in Eretz Yisrael will enable Jews to obtain knowledge of G-d which is a means for understanding the human purpose.

The King responds to the Rabbi's practical argument, questioning why one, such as the Rabbi, who cherishes freedom, would obligate himself to new religious duties which are only required in Israel, but are irrelevant in exile.<sup>32</sup> To this, the Rabbi responds:

I only seek freedom from the service of those numerous people whose favor I do not care for, and shall never obtain, though I worked for it all my life. Even if I could obtain it, it would not profit me--I mean serving men and courting their favor. I would rather seek the service of the One whose favor is obtained with the smallest effort, yet it profits in this world and the next. This is the favor

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<sup>30</sup> Kuzari. V:23.

<sup>31</sup> Cohn-Sherbok, Dan. Medieval Jewish Philosophy: An Introduction. Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996. p.64.

<sup>32</sup> Kuzari. V:24.

of God, His service spells freedom, and humility before Him is true honor.<sup>33</sup>

Although the Rabbi makes several arguments as to why obligating himself to more religious duties in the Land of Israel is better than living in Galut, his most poetic response is, "His service spells freedom."<sup>34</sup> The Rabbi suggests that obedience to the will of G-d is the only path to true freedom, and thus living in Israel where more of G-d's will can be followed leads to greater freedom.

The Kuzari conveys that the Shechinah exists deep within the Jews who live righteously, and are pure of heart and mind before the G-d of Israel.<sup>35</sup> Israel, with the sanctity of its air, inspires Jews who live there to be pure in heart and virtuous in deeds. Living in Israel creates a domino effect where Jews are motivated to uphold strong values which leads to their connection with the Divine Presence. There are a plethora of commandments to be found in the Torah which are not applicable to those living chutz l'aaretz. Thus, those who obey the totality of mitzvot should go to the Land. In this way, G-d distinguishes Eretz Yisrael as a place where Jews can completely fulfill G-d's commandments.

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33 Kuzari. V:25.

34 Kuzari. V:25.

35 Kuzari. V:22.

## **Nahmanides**

And the Lord spoke unto Moses in the plains of Moav by the Jordan at Jericho, saying: Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them: When ye pass over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then ye shall dispossess all the inhabitants of the land, and destroy all their figured stones, and destroy all their molten images, and demolish all their high places. And ye shall inherit of the land, and dwell therein; for unto you have I given the land to possess it.<sup>36</sup>

Basing himself on this passage, Nahmanides believes that we are commanded as Jews to take possession of the Land of Israel from G-d and we are commanded to live there.<sup>37</sup> Nahmanides states:

In my opinion, this is a positive command of the Torah wherein He commanded them to settle in the Land, and inherit it; for He gave it to them; and they should not reject the heritage of the Lord! Should it enter their mind, for instance, to go and conquer the land of Shinar or Assyria or any other country and settle therein, they would have transgressed a commandment of G-d. And that which our Rabbis have emphasized, the significance of the commandment of settling in the Land of Israel, and that it is forbidden to leave it and that they consider a woman who does not want to emigrate with her husband to live in the Land of Israel as 'rebellious'<sup>38</sup>, and likewise the man the source of all these statements is here where we have been given this commandment, for this verse constitutes a positive commandment. This commandment

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<sup>36</sup> Num. 33:50-53.

<sup>37</sup> Henech, Chayim, Ramban: Philosopher and Kabbalist, Northvale: Jason Aaronson Inc., 1998. p. 114-115. The commandment of conquering the Land and dwelling in Israel is an imperative in Ramban's philosophy.

<sup>38</sup> Ketubot 110.

He repeats in many places, such as, 'Go in and possess the Land.'<sup>39</sup> Rashi, however explained: 'And ye shall drive out the inhabitants of the Land--you dispossess it of its inhabitants, then ye will be able to dwell therein, and to remain there, but if not, you will not be able to remain in it.' But our interpretation is the principal one.<sup>40</sup>

In the biblical text upon which Ramban comments (Num. 33:52-53), the word ve'horashtem appears twice. Despite its repetition, however, the word has been interpreted to mean two different things. Nahmanides draws a sharp distinction between his interpretation and that of Rashi's. Rashi suggests that the first use of the word ve'horashtem means "dispossess it of its inhabitants," whereas the second use of the word means "then ye will be able to dwell therein." Rashi sees the first use of ve'horashtem ("dispossess it of its inhabitants") as merely a logical necessity which must take place before the children of Israel "will be able to dwell therein".<sup>41</sup> Nahmanides, on the other hand, interprets the first use of ve'horashtem to be the commandment to settle or inherit the land. The second use of ve'horashtem is the actualization of this commandment. Ramban considers conquering the Land and dwelling in the Land as one of the Torah's positive mitzvot. He claims that if we do not follow this commandment then we are rejecting our inheritance not just from our ancient ancestors but from G-d. For Rashi, the explanation of the repetition of ve'horashtem is not

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39 Deut. 1:8.

40 Nahmanides commenting on Num. 33:50-53.

41 Leibowitz, Nehama, Studies in Bamidbar (Numbers) translated by Aryeh Newman, Jerusalem: Haomanim Press, 1995. p. 396-7.

connected in any way to spirituality or the positive commandment of inheriting or settling the Land.

It is important in understanding Nahmanides' interpretation of the word ve'horashtem to look at its etymology. Yahrahsh, the root of the word, means "to take possession of", "inherit", "dispossess." In the Brown-Driver-Briggs concordance, ve'horashtem found in Num. 33:52, 55 is translated as: "cause others to possess or inherit, then gen. dispossess."<sup>42</sup> Within Num. 33:53 ve'horashtem is translated as "take possession of, esp. by force, have as a possession, often with collat. idea of taking in place of others, succeeding to, inheriting."<sup>43</sup>

Nahmanides quotes from Bereshit Rabbah with the following homiletic exposition:

Rabbi Yitzchak said: The Torah, which is the book of laws, should have begun with the verse, 'This month shall be unto you the first of the months,'<sup>44</sup> which is the first commandment given to Israel. What then is the reason that it begins with the creation? Should the nations of the world say to Israel, 'You are robbers because you took unto yourselves the lands of the seven nations of Canaan,' they [Israel] may reply to them, 'The whole world belongs to the Holy One, blessed be He. He gave it to whom He pleased, and according to His Will, He took it [the Land] from them and gave it to us.'<sup>45</sup>

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42 Brown, F., Driver, S., and Briggs, C. The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996. p. 440.

43 Ibid., p. 439.

44 Exod. 12:2.

45 Nahmanides commenting on Gen. 1:1. Bereshit Rabbah Gen. 1:1.



That G-d gave the Land to the People of Israel explains the commandment to go up and possess the Land of Israel since for Nahmanides that it belongs to us as if it said, "For unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these lands."<sup>46</sup> Amos 9:7 shows that it is G-d who declares each nation's border: "Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, And the Philistines from Caphtor, and Aram from Kir?"<sup>47</sup> For Ramban, that G-d bestowed the Land of Israel upon the Israelites gives us as Jews the moral obligation to possess the Land and dwell there.

Nahmanides believes that holiness separates the Land from other places in the world, for, it is a land cared for by G-d alone. Nahmanides conveys this belief:

Now 'the Glorious Name' is 'G-d of gods,' and 'Lord of lords' over the whole world. But the Land of Israel, which is in the middle of the civilized world, is the inheritance of the Eternal designated to His Name. He has placed none of the angels as 'chief, observer, or ruler' over it, since He gave it as a heritage to His people who declare the Unity of His Name, the seed of His beloved ones. It is with reference to this that He said, 'and you shall be Mine own treasure from among the peoples; for all the earth is mine,' and it is further written, 'so shall you be My people, and I will be your G-d,' and you will not be subject to other powers at all.<sup>48</sup>

Nahmanides claims that G-d governs over all of the world's forces, however, there is no force which G-d rules over when it comes to the Land of Israel since it belongs solely to G-d. From these references

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<sup>46</sup> Gen. 26:31.

<sup>47</sup> Amos 9:7.

<sup>48</sup> Nahmanides commenting on Lev. 18:25.

to the importance of the Land of Israel to G-d, Ramban deduces that the Land of Israel should be so important to the Jews. Clearly, if the "G-d of gods" values the Land of Israel so that G-d alone rules over it, then Jews may not downplay the Land's significance. Nahmanides intertwines

G-d's love of the people of Israel with G-d's love for the Land of Israel.<sup>49</sup> Ramban notes that G-d left G-d's favorite piece of land to G-d's favorite people "since He gave it as a heritage to His people."<sup>50</sup>

The central meaning of all of the commandments is most understood where the divine presence is truly felt. Nahmanides applies this notion to the obligation to recite the Birkat Hamazon: "You shall eat and be satisfied and bless the Lord your G-d upon the good land which G-d has given you."<sup>51</sup> Nahmanides provides a reason why this prayer, which blesses G-d for the food we have just consumed, is connected with the location where G-d should be blessed:

The meaning of the expression *for the good Land* is 'and for the good Land;' that is, He commands that you are to bless Him at all times for the food you eat to satisfaction, and for the Land that He gave you in order that you might have it forever as an inheritance and be satisfied with its goodness. Thus the obligatory nature of this commandment is in every place.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Henech, Chayim, Ramban: Philosopher and Kabbalist, Northvale: Jason Aaronson Inc., 1998. p. 118. Thus, Ramban believes that this strong relationship between G-d and the Land of Israel causes those people who dwell in Israel to truly recognize and feel the holiness of the Land.

<sup>50</sup> Nahmanides commenting on Lev. 18:25.

<sup>51</sup> Deut. 8:10.

<sup>52</sup> Deut. 8:10.

The commandment to live in the Land of Israel is so important and obligatory that it is attached to the fundamental act of eating through the commandment to recite the Birkat Hamazon. Hence, Nahmanides connects the commandment to bless G-d for the food we eat on the Land which G-d has given us not just as evidence that as Jews we are meant to live in the Land of Israel, but more significantly that Nahmanides claims that we must uphold the commandments in Galut and practice them repeatedly so as to assure ourselves that when we return to the Land of Israel we will remember how to observe these mitzvot.

"And you shall quickly perish"<sup>53</sup>, even when I exile you from the land distinguish yourself with mitzvot, in order that when you return they shall not be new unto you. This may be likened to a master who was angry with his wife and sent her to her father's house. He said to her: Keep putting on jewelry, for when you'll return they won't be new to you. And so said the prophet Jeremiah: "Set up signs for yourself."<sup>54</sup> These are the mitzvot that distinguish Israel. And the verse says: "You will speedily perish, and you put my words into your hearts."<sup>55</sup> He is only obligated in exile with bodily mitzvot such as Tefillin and Mezuzah, and it was explained that they shall not be new, when we return to of Israel, for the main thrust of the mitzvot belongs to the inhabitants of the Lord's land.<sup>56</sup>

Once again, the entire focus is on the Land of Israel and more specifically on "bodily" mitzvot. It is strange that the mitzvah of

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53 Deut. 11:17.

54 Jer. 31:20.

55 Deut. 11:18.

56 Nahmanides commenting on Lev. 18:25.

Mezuzah would be grouped in as a "bodily" mitzvah, since it does not appear to involve the body as the mitzvah of Tefillin does. However, it could be argued that just as the mitzvah of Tefillin requires us to affix the words of G-d onto our bodies, which are a gift from G-d to house our souls, so too the mitzvah of Mezuzah is "bodily" in nature in that it requires us to affix the words of G-d onto the structure that houses our bodies. Nahmanides claims that in Galut we are obligated to fulfill these bodily mitzvot such as the mitzvah of Tefillin and Mezuzah not only for their intrinsic value as commandments from G-d, but also to assure that these observances will not be a new experience for us when we return to the Land of Israel.

Additionally, Nahmanides often equates the home as an extension of the body, stating, "when Israel is wholly committed (shelemim) to the Lord, the spirit of the Lord will always be upon them to preserve their bodies, clothing, and houses in a good appearance."<sup>57</sup>

G-d personally controls the Land of Israel and also bestows great blessings and praises upon it as seen through Nahmanides' interpretation of Exod. 3:8:

The meaning of flowing with milk and honey is that he praises the "goodness of the land," that is, the air is good and wholesome for the people and all good things can be found in it; and that it is "spacious," that is, all of Israel is able to live there comfortably, or it is "spacious," that it contains low, deep portions and plains, big and small, with few mountains. And then he praises it, for being good grazing ground for cattle, with clean water, and for the production of milk, which needs clean water and pure air. Moreover, its fruits are fat and sweet until their juices flow like honey. And, behold, he praises it for all

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<sup>57</sup> Nahmanides commenting on Lev. 13:47.

the Divine abundance of grain, wine and oil, and for its sheep and cattle. As it is written: "It is like a deer compared to all lands."<sup>58 59</sup>

Ramban painstakingly goes through each and every element of the Land that G-d describes, drawing attention to all of the praise which G-d lavishes on the Land. Nahmanides goes through this process to stress the goodness of the land, and its supreme importance to G-d.

Nahmanides also maintains that the verse: "A Land . . . whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may dig copper"<sup>60</sup> proves that G-d favors the Land of Israel over all of the other lands.

that where you thought them to be stone, you will find iron, for it is taken from its dust. Hence, he announces to them that the land of Israel is a quarry for copper and iron, both being very necessary for the inhabitants, and also silver and gold are not missing. In Targum Yerushalmi, I read that: "the stones are as bright as iron," meaning to say that the verse praises the Land because in it there will be found quarries of great stones, costly stones, hewn stones with which to build houses, walls, and towers, unlike the land of Egypt and many lands where people dwell in houses of clay and their houses may become their graves.<sup>61</sup>

Nahmanides believes that G-d reveals to us that in the Land of Israel the stones are replaced with iron since this iron originates from the dust of the Land. In the Land there is a vast amount of copper, iron, silver and gold. In addition, the Land is not lacking in building

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<sup>58</sup> Ezekiel 20:6.

<sup>59</sup> Nahmanides commenting on Exod. 3:8.

<sup>60</sup> Deut. 8:9.

<sup>61</sup> Nahmanides commenting on Deut. 8:9.



stones while the Egyptians and those from other lands are forced to use mud since they do not have such great amounts of other natural resources. Unlike the previous passage, in which Nahmanides draws attention to the many positive qualities of the Land itself, here Nahmanides uses another tactic to establish the ultimate significance of the Land. The focus is not just on the empirical qualities of the land (that it possesses copper and iron), but also on how the Land compares to other lands, such as Egypt. What merits attention here, is Nahmanides' reference to the mud. Perhaps this is merely a reference to the Land being better situated. However, the "mud that threatens to become their graves" could be an explicit allusion to the very life-saving powers that the Land has to offer. Ramban seems to be suggesting that not only does the Land have valuable minerals such as gold and silver, which can improve your wealth, but more importantly the Land possesses important building materials such as copper and iron which could save your life.

According to Nahmanides the Land of Israel is not just unique because of the large amount of natural resources found in the Land but also because of the revelation of public and hidden miracles. Ramban discusses the rare occurrence of the disease *tsara'at*. Nahmanides discusses Lev. 13:47 which states: "The garment also in which is the plague of *tsara'at* . . ."<sup>62</sup>:

This [disease, *tsara'at*] is not natural and does not occur [just anywhere] in the world, and similarly plagues in the houses. when Israel is wholly committed (*shelemim*) to the Lord, the spirit of the Lord will always be upon them to preserve their bodies, clothing, and houses in a good

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62 Lev. 13:47.



appearance. Thus as soon as one of them commits a sin or transgression, something ugly appears in his flesh, or on his garment, or in his house, revealing that G-d has turned aside from him. This will happen only in the chosen land... the matter is miraculous (nes).<sup>63</sup>

According to Ramban, *tsara'at* can only occur in Israel. However, when Israelites are living in the Land and are committed to G-d, Nahmanides claims that G-d will protect the appearance of their bodies, clothing and houses. Nevertheless, if someone among the Israelites commits a sin, they will experience this disease. "And I put a plague of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession."<sup>64</sup> Ramban states that cases of *tsara'at* are only found in the Land of Israel. Here, it is interesting to note that Nahmanides illuminates a unique element of the Land which arguably is not very appealing. If the plague of *tsara'at* is only found in the Land of Israel, then this would appear to be a reason to avoid such a place. However, Nahmanides brings up the geographic anomaly of *tsara'at* in the Land of Israel to further illustrate the Land's unique nature. Additionally, Ramban uses *tsara'at* to note the miracle of G-d's willingness to prevent this plague in the Land of Israel when the people are committed.

Nahmanides believes that along with the Land's unique character the Land of Israel is sanctified by G-d because of its centrality through the ancient Temple. Ramban comments regarding / Gen. 14:18:

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63 Nahmanides commenting on Lev. 13:47.

64 Lev. 14:34.

... From antiquity the nations knew that this place, which was the choicest of all places, is in the center of the inhabited region. Or perhaps they knew of its superiority by tradition, i.e., that it is exactly opposite the Heavenly Sanctuary, where the Divine Glory of the Holy One, blessed be He, who is called Tzedek abides.<sup>65</sup>

Nahmanides goes on to quote from Bereshit Rabbah 43:6 in his commentary, which provides an explanation for why Jerusalem is called Tzedek. Jerusalem causes the people who are dwelling there to become Tzedek. In addition, Melchizedek is translated as "the lord of Tzedek." Thus, Jerusalem is referred to as Tzedek, since it has: "Tzedek lodged in it."<sup>66</sup>

Nahmanides affirms his belief, in his comments regarding Lev. 26:42, that the eternal Covenant between G-d and Israel provides the Land with her blessings and sanctity. Ramban writes:

... It is possible according to the way of truth, that he is saying: "And I will remember Jacob and Isaac and Abraham, who are the men of the covenant," for all attributes are so called when they are in the covenant: "v'ha'aretz (and the earth), which is composed of them all, I will remember among them," Our Rabbis have so alluded. Thus, they said:<sup>67</sup> "And why does He mention the merit of ha'aretz with them? Said Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish: This is like the case of a master who had three daughters, and one maidservant who raised them. Whenever the master asked about the welfare of his daughters, he would say: 'Ask on my behalf about the welfare of she who raises them.'"<sup>68</sup>

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65 Nahmanides commenting on Gen. 14:18.

66 Nahmanides commenting on Gen. 14:18.

67 Vayiqra Rabbah 36:5.

68 Nahmanides commenting on Lev. 26:42.

According to Ramban, G-d remembered Jacob, Isaac and Abraham (as opposed to just one of them) because, all three were parties to the covenant with G-d. Therefore, Ramban is saying that the covenant cannot be thought of without thinking of the relationship that each of the patriarchs shared in creating that covenant. By including the Land of Israel when remembering the covenant, Nahmanides is suggesting that the Land, is also a party to the covenant. Neither the Land of Israel, nor Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob can be left out of the covenant since all were an integral part to its creation.

Nahmanides believes that through our covenant with G-d we maintain our commitment to being G-d's people and upholding G-d's commandments. In turn, G-d keeps us and protects us by sanctifying and blessing the Land of Israel, our maidservant, who is responsible for us as Jews.

Ramban views the commandment presented in Num. 33:53 of conquering and dwelling in the Land as incumbent upon all generations of the Jewish people. He went beyond the description of the Land flowing with milk and honey to describe G-d's singular control over the Land. For, Ramban, it was and should be the goal of every Jew to go and live in Eretz Yisrael, for the Land is a gift from G-d as part of our heritage and part of our Covenantal relationship.

## **Rav Kook**

Rav Kook viewed the Land of Israel in both philosophical and practical terms. Practically, he developed a plan for how Jews should live in the Land of Israel. For example, Rav Kook envisioned a chain of yeshivot that studied both religious and secular subjects, empowering its students with the ability to conduct a dialogue with both religious and secular Jews. In this chapter, however, Rav Kook will be discussed in terms of his mystical and philosophical approach to Eretz Yisrael, so that his thoughts can be seen in relation to those of Halevi and Ramban.

The Land of Israel is not something external, not an external national asset, a means to the end of collective solidarity and the strengthening of the nation's existence, physical or even spiritual. The Land of Israel is an essential unit bound by the bond-of-life to the People, united by inner characteristics to its existence.

Therefore, it is impossible to appreciate the content of the sanctity of the Land of Israel and to actualize the depth of love for her by some rational human understanding -only by the spirit of G-d that is in the soul of Israel. This spirit radiates natural hues in all avenues of healthy feeling and shines according to the measure of supernal holy spirit, which fills with life and pleasantness the heart of the holy of thoughts and deep Jewish thinkers. .

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For Rav Kook the Land of Israel is obviously an imperative component to the Jewish people. Beyond this axiom, however, it is difficult to quantify the importance of Israel, since Rav Kook contends that the Land of Israel is beyond rational understanding. It

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69 Orot Me-Ofel. Chapter I.

seems, though, that if the Jewish people was the body, then Rav Kook would consider Eretz Yisrael the lungs, and the spirit of G-d as the air we breathe. For Rav Kook, this is the degree of inseparability in the relationship between Eretz Yisrael and the Jewish people. Rav Kook goes even further by suggesting that it is only through the spirit of G-d (breathing) that we can understand Eretz Yisrael (our lungs). Because Eretz Yisrael is an internal fundament to the very existence of the Jews, Rav Kook does not envision the Land of Israel as an external tool which we can utilize to strengthen our peoplehood and our sense of spirituality. Rather, the Land is already a part of us and cannot be thought of as a separate entity which can exert some force.

By so inexorably linking an attachment to the Land of Israel to the spirit of G-d, Rav Kook makes an understanding of this spirit of G-d an essential element to unlocking the Land's mysteries. However, the concept of monotheism in Jewish tradition does not just state that there is one G-d but also that G-d is beyond our understanding. In the Torah G-d is given a front and sides, hands and a voice to make G-d more "user friendly" for the non-philosophical, however as Maimonides claims in his Guide For the Perplexed, G-d is beyond rational thinking. It logically follows that Rav Kook would claim, as a more recent philosopher, that the Land of Israel, which is inherently a part of G-d and our people, is also beyond our understanding.

It would seem that an alternative way to explain Eretz Yisrael is to examine its impact on those who lived there. Of all the patriarchs, Isaac seems to have the most intimate relationship with the Land of Israel. He is the first patriarch who was born in the



Land and, according to Rashi, he never leaves it. Rashi interprets Gen. 26:2 which states: "And the Eternal appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt: dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of."<sup>70</sup> Rashi believes that the reason the Eternal did not want Isaac to go down to Egypt is because he is a "burnt-offering without blemish" and living outside the Land of Israel would not be good for him.<sup>71</sup> The implication is that staying in the Land of Israel is in some way "good for him," although why this is so is left ambiguous. Unfortunately, Isaac's close relationship with the Land of Israel does not refute Rav Kook's theory that truly understanding Israel is beyond our ability.

According to Rav Kook, the Land of Israel does not provide Jews living in Galut with stronger Jewish identities. He claims that the Land of Israel as an external entity of the Jewish people is "shaky compared to the holy might of the Land of Israel"<sup>72</sup> itself. Rav Kook comments regarding strengthening Jewish life in exile:

. . . The true strengthening of the Jewish idea in exile will come about only through the depth of its immersion in the Land of Israel, and from the hope of the Land of Israel it will receive always its essential characteristics. The expectation of salvation is the force that preserves exilic Judaism; the Judaism of the Land of Israel is salvation itself.<sup>73</sup>

Rav Kook believes that Jews who are living in Galut are obliged if they look for salvation to desperately want to return to Eretz Yisrael.

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<sup>70</sup> Gen. 26:2.

<sup>71</sup> Bereshit Rabbah: Rashi commenting on Gen. 26:2.

<sup>72</sup> Orot Me-Ofel. Chapter I.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.



Only when the Jews living outside of the Land crave their return to the Land, and their essence and their existence is solely based upon returning to the Land, will their Jewish identities be strengthened. If Jews are truly yearning to return to the Land when reciting the words found at the end of the Pesach Hagadah: "next year in Jerusalem," their Jewishness will be preserved. For Rav Kook, the Judaism of the exile survives only on the expectation of "salvation." However, for Rav Kook, the Judaism of Eretz Yisrael itself equals "salvation." Therefore, the Jews of the exile must long to live in the Land of Israel, since for Rav Kook, this is the very meaning of salvation.

Rav Kook writes that: "it is impossible for a Jew to be faithful to his thoughts and visions outside the Land."<sup>74</sup> He believes that a Jew is much more faithful in Eretz Yisrael since "manifestation of holiness, of whatever level, tends to be pure in the Land,"<sup>75</sup> as opposed to in the Galut where Jews' expression of holiness is "mixed with dross."<sup>76</sup> Despite the finality of Rav Kook's language, stating the impossibility of faithfulness for a Jew living in the Galut, Rav Kook suggests a way in which a Jew living in exile can overcome this impossibility. Rav Kook writes how a Jew's longing for the Land in the Galut causes thoughts to become purified:

. . . However, in relation to the longing and attachment of a person to the Land of Israel, his thoughts become purified by virtue of the air of the Land of Israel that

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<sup>74</sup> Orot Me-Ofel. Chapter IV.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

hovers over all who long to see her. "Gladden Jerusalem and rejoice in her all her lovers."<sup>77 78</sup>

Once again, we find Rav Kook upholding his belief that Israel cannot be a "means to the end of collective solidarity"<sup>79</sup> or any other external force upon the Jewish people as a whole. Rather, longing for the Land of Israel purifies a Jew's thoughts only "in relation to the longing and attachment of a person to the Land of Israel."<sup>80</sup>

"Intellect and imagination are intertwined and interact"<sup>81</sup> just as Israel, Jewish tradition and the Jewish people are intertwined and interact. These three entities, which are essential to one another, can be compared to the three strands of dough which come together to create the challah or the three strands of wax which intertwine and interact to create the havdalah candle. In each of these examples, the individual components are essential in order to create the final product. For Rav Kook, this is also true as to Israel, Judaism and the Jewish people, whereby Israel is imperative to the end result. Zeruf sal is a halakhic tool in which many small individual rolls within one basket are defined as one bonded challah, since the rolls are not only adjacent to one another but also touch one another in the basket. This phenomenon is discussed in the Mishnah: ". . . Even when they are detached from the side of the oven and placed in a basket, the basket includes them together. . ."<sup>82</sup> Rav Kook continues to claim

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<sup>77</sup> Isa. 66:10.

<sup>78</sup> Orot Me-Ofel. Chapter IV.

<sup>79</sup> Orot Me-Ofel. Chapter I.

<sup>80</sup> Orot Me-Ofel. Chapter IV.

<sup>81</sup> Orot Me-Ofel. Chapter V.

<sup>82</sup> Mishnah Challah. 2:4.

within his writings that Israel is an essential entity not to be regarded as separate from Judaism and the Jewish people.

Rav Kook affirms the belief that the Jewish people and the practice of Judaism cannot survive without Israel through his claim that prophecy cannot exist outside the Land. According to Rav Kook, imagination symbolizes prophecy and cannot radiate and interact with the same intensity as in the Land of Israel. He writes:

The imagination of the Land of Israel is pure and clear and suited for the appearance of the divine truth, for garbing the lofty, exalted will of the ideal direction that is at the height of holiness; ready for the explication of prophecy and its lights, for the shining of divine inspiration and its brightness. The imagination that is in the Lands of the Nations is murky, mixed with darkness, with shadows of impurity and pollution. It cannot ascend to the heights of holiness and cannot be the basis for the influx of divine light that transcends the lowness of worlds and their straits. Since intellect and imagination are intertwined and interact, even the intellect outside the Land cannot shine with the same light as in the Land. The air of the Land makes us wise.<sup>83</sup>

Rav Kook interprets Maimonides' belief, arguing that prophecy exists solely in Eretz Yisrael. Rav Kook connects Maimonides' contention that the end result of prophecy is our imagination,<sup>84</sup> with his own view that the "murkiness, mixed with darkness, with shadows of impurity and pollution"<sup>85</sup> found in the Galut prevents the occurrence of prophecy outside the Land. Prophecy, however, is inextricably linked with imagination for Rav Kook, and for this reason,

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<sup>83</sup> Orot Me-Ofel. Chapter V.

<sup>84</sup> Maimonides, Guide of the Perplexed. II: 36, 37.

<sup>85</sup> Orot Me-Ofel. Chapter V.

"imagination cannot ascend to the heights of holiness"<sup>86</sup> and cannot bring about the divine prophetic light. Rav Kook goes on to argue that other achievements short of revelation, such as pure intellect, are dulled outside the Land of Israel.

Rav Kook upholds the value of absorbing ourselves in the Land of Israel. He believes that this is the only way that Jews in the Galut and Judaism will survive. He claims that once Jews immerse themselves in the Land and experience its mysteries, these benefits will never leave them. For an example, a Jew who finds that he must leave Eretz Yisrael will continue to long for the pure air. The fact that he recognizes that the air outside the Land is impure allows him to experience holiness, and even prophecy, found within the Land. Simply yearning for the Land, especially after once experiencing its holiness, results in never being left without all of the benefits of the Land as long as one continues to hope for one's return. Rav Kook writes:

The effect of the holy spirit absorbed in the Land of Israel works constantly, even if it should happen that a person leaves the Land by mistake or necessity. Even prophecy, once it had come to rest in the Land of Israel, did not cease outside the Land. . . . The flow of holiness, which began in the Land of Israel, gathers all the refined (sparks) of holiness found outside the Land in all the depths and attracts them by its magnetism. The more difficult it is to endure the air outside the Land, the more one feels the spirit of impurity of an impure land -this is a sign of an inner absorption of the holiness of the Land of Israel, of a supernal (divine) love, which will not abandon one who has merited to find shelter in the pure

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

shade of the Land of Life, even when one wanders far away, even in one's land of exile.<sup>87</sup>

Rav Kook believes that the holy spirit which is absorbed in the Land of Israel can linger on. The spark of holiness which commences within Eretz Yisrael will not die subsequently in the Galut.

Imagination, which leads to prophecy and the absorption of holiness, "will not abandon one who has merited to find shelter in the pure shade of the Land of Life,"<sup>88</sup> since one has discovered how "difficult it is to endure the air outside the Land,"<sup>89</sup> even when one wanders in "one's land of exile."<sup>90</sup> For Rav Kook, entering the Land of Israel, even if one leaves after a short time, is nothing short of critical to Jewish identity. It appears in this passage, that those who have actually physically entered Eretz Yisrael, even if for only a short while, are in a better position than those who simply long for it. Rav Kook emphasizes this point by referring to the powerful flow of holiness which "began" in Eretz Yisrael. Without Eretz Yisrael, therefore, the flow of holiness could not have begun.

However, Rav Kook does see a spiritual benefit to living outside of the Land, which cannot be derived from living in the Land of Israel. Longing for Israel outside the Land can provide one with a spiritual benefit which of course cannot take place if one resides in the Land. He writes:

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<sup>87</sup> Orot Me-Ofel. Chapter VI.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.



The strangeness one feels outside the Land binds all the inner spiritual desire to the Land of Israel and its holiness even more. The expectation to see her grow stronger and the mental picture of the holy structure of a land which the eyes of the Lord are upon always, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year deepens. When the deep holy desire of love of Zion, of remembrance of the Land, to which all delights are attached, grows strong in the soul, even the individual soul, it opens up a fountain flow for the entire community, for myriad souls attached to her, and the voice of the shofar (ram's horn) of the ingathering of the exiles is aroused and great (divine) mercy prevails, the hope of life for Israel glitters, the sapling of the Lord flourishes, and the light of salvation and redemption breaks and spreads, as dawn spreading on the mountains.<sup>91</sup>

This concept of "absence makes the heart grow fonder" rings true in so many elements of life. It is the experience of missing that place that we recently vacationed in or that long distance lover that makes us long for it or for him even more. Rav Kook understands that this earnest desire is what maintains the spark of holiness and keeps us immersed in the Land of Israel. People who find themselves in long distance relationships hope that the memories of each visit will keep the passion alive even after they have to return to their separate homes. These lovers continue to reunite in order to refuel that memory once again for the next long separation. So too it is with Jews who live in the Galut. Their memory of Israel is what will keep the spark of holiness alive within them and will strengthen their lives in the Galut. According to Rav Kook, Jews cannot survive without the holiness of the Land of Israel. "The expectation of

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

salvation is the force that preserves exilic Judaism; the Judaism of the Land of Israel is salvation itself."<sup>92</sup>

Rav Kook discusses in kabbalistic terms how all of the mitzvot are connected to one another and how we are connected to all 613 mitzvot. The soul is filled with a plethora of letters, according to Rav Kook, which are fueled with the "light of life, intellect and will, a spirit of vision, and complete existence."<sup>93</sup> These letters are alive and ignite every single area of life including: "will, intellect, action, spirit and soul."<sup>94</sup> Each individual mitzvah is alive and is also filled with active letters. The letters of each mitzvah include: "the splendorous light of the Living G-d, the light of the Life-of-Worlds."<sup>95</sup> When we are about to perform a mitzvah, all of the letters which are housed within our souls expand, and connect with the letters of the mitzvot causing a cosmic eruption. This eruption leaves behind a strong feeling of inner satisfaction and the renewal of light and life.<sup>96</sup> Rav Kook writes how the Land of Israel nourishes these living letters within our souls:

In the Land of Israel the letters of our soul expand, expose the light, draw nourishment from the splendor of life of Knesset Yisrael, and are nourished directly from the secret source of their formation. The air of the Land of Israel produces the fresh growth of these living letters, with splendid beauty, with pleasant amicability, and with thunderous power full of a holy flow. "All who are

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<sup>92</sup> Orot Me-Ofel. Chapter I.

<sup>93</sup> Orot Me-Ofel. Chapter VII.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

written for life in Jerusalem."<sup>97</sup> The expectation to see the beauty of the land of delight, the inner longing for the Land of Israel expands the letters of holiness, the essential Israelite letters of life that are within us.<sup>98</sup>

Rav Kook claims that exclusively in the Land of Israel the letters of our soul can expand since the splendor of the life in Knesset Yisrael provides nourishment and direct light from its true source. Rav Kook seems to be suggesting that the parent(s) of these letters live(s) in the Land of Israel. There is nothing like a home cooked meal, the fresh air that surrounds our home, and the warm cozy bed with the smell we grew up with. Nobody truly knows how to tend to us and to our needs like our parents. Similarly, in the Land of Israel the letters can grow and be truly healthy, for, this is where they were born. However, we all must grow up and move on, but our childhood memories alone nourish us and sustain us. According to Rav Kook, our strong desire to return home to refuel our needs enables us to grow. When Jews long for Eretz Yisrael the letters within their souls are nourished and thus, expand. This enables Jews in the Galut to perform mitzvot resulting in the restoration of the light of life and the light of the world.

Rav Kook continues with his allegorical references to Israel's benefit by claiming that the internal chambers of the heart long for Israel. "The flames glow in the heart of the righteous, a holy flame ascends, and in the heart of the entire nation it burns constantly."<sup>99</sup> Here, Rav Kook states that if the heart of the righteous longs for

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<sup>97</sup> Isa. 4:3.

<sup>98</sup> Orot Me-Ofel. Chapter VII.

<sup>99</sup> Orot Me-Ofel. Chapter VIII.

Israel then so too will the heart of the Nation of Israel itself, referring perhaps to the important role that the few can play in the longing for Israel that is felt by the nation as a whole. This theme is perhaps also seen in a selection from the poetry of Rav Kook: "In a foreign land there is zero restfulness, one found a bitter life and no satisfaction. The spirit of heroes, concealed in the heart, meets obstacles and suffers pain."<sup>100</sup> Once again, Rav Kook segregates out from the nation of Jews a minority for distinction. In the above example, it was the righteous, and here it is the heroes, but in both cases, the feelings in the hearts of these individuals is of great concern to Rav Kook. Their longing or suffering has a clear impact on the Jewish people as a whole. Perhaps Rav Kook focuses on these two groups as representatives of the Nation of Israel. In the case of the righteous, then, clearly if a longing burns in their hearts, this will transcend the nation as a whole.

Rav Kook concludes the section of Orot Me-Ofel, regarding Eretz Yisrael, with the ultimate desire for the Land:

... And this is the desire for the Land of Israel, the holy soil, the Land of G-d, in which all the mitzvot are actualized. This desire for the actualization of the spirit of G-d, for uplifting the head in the greatness of the spirit of G-d, works on all the hearts and all want to unite with it to taste the pleasantness of its life. "Therefore I loved your mitzvot more than gold."<sup>101</sup> ... this does not amaze one who is connected in the depths of his spirit to the depths of Knesset Yisrael and knows her wonderful gifts. This is the secret of strength, the height of life that will never end. "And you shall observe my laws and

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100 Orot ha-Reayah: Galut.

101 Psalm 119:127.

judgments, which if a man do them, he shall live thereby, I am the Lord."<sup>102</sup> "To walk before the Lord in the land of life."<sup>103</sup> This is the Land of Israel.<sup>104</sup>

According to Rav Kook, the nation of Israel upholds the Jewish people's "character, name, values, faith, and vision."<sup>105</sup> Our hope for Israel must represent our life desire during our quest for truth. He ultimately believes that every single mitzvah which is illuminated by the "light of Torah in all its fullness and goodness should glow"<sup>106</sup> upon Eretz Yisrael.

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102 Lev. 18:5.

103 Psalm 56:14 and 116:9.

104 Orot Me-Ofel. Chapter VIII.

105 Ibid.

106 Ibid.



## Conclusion

Yehuda Halevi believes that Israel inspires Jews who live there to uphold strong values, which in turn leads to their connection with the Divine Presence. In addition, he claims that many of the mitzvot are not applicable to those living chutz l'aaretz. Rav Kook complements this belief in his allegorical claim that the letters of the mitzvot expand in the Land of Israel. Therefore G-d separates Eretz Yisrael from the rest of the world, making it the place where Jews can completely fulfill G-d's mitzvot and are privy to experiencing prophecy. For Ramban, the mitzvah of conquering and dwelling in the Land is required by all generations of the Jewish people.

Thus, as Jews living in the Galut in the year 5760, we must continue to have Israel experiences where we spend some time living in Israel and struggle with where the Land fits into our lives as Jews. Rav Kook concurs with Nahmanides that we must live in the Land at least once in our lives. Rav Kook suggests that we can exist most successfully as Jews only if we live in the Land. If, after living in the Land, we must return to the Galut, then we must long for the Land of Israel. Rav Kook contends that this longing will absorb the Galut within the Land of Israel and save Judaism and the Jewish people. For these three thinkers Israel is the only way to truly experience Judaism, even if it means living there and returning with the Land deeply embedded within our hearts and within our souls.

In applying Nahmanides' interpretations of the Torah text to the twenty-first century we turn to the commandment found in Num. 33:50-53 to conquer and dwell in the Land. This

commandment should really speak to liberal rabbis even though we are not bound by halakhah. Since we have to be so pluralistic in our approach, we are constantly selling the Jewish traditions to Jews. Sermons, bulletin articles and lesson plans consist of encouraging Jews to take on more mitzvot. The mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisrael is the ultimate mitzvah to sell to liberal Jews. The observance of this particular mitzvah will cause a positive domino effect where Jews who are living in Israel can easily uphold other commandments. An example of this is the Israeli calendar. The Israeli calendar is also the Jewish calendar, meaning you cannot help but know when hagim are taking place since the entire country closes down or community cultural observances take place.

It is interesting to compare the passionate commitment which most of the ancient sages held to upholding the commandment of conquering and living in the Land of Israel to the somewhat ambivalent feeling which most Jews hold today. It scares me that many commandments which were once so vital are no longer upheld as vigorously. In liberal circles, rabbis struggle with the fact that many Jews are choosing cremation over burial. Jewish parents are also questioning the commandment of brit milah, rejecting it because it seems to them barbaric, rather than a connection to our ancient ancestors. And we cannot forget that at one time Jews would not even consider marrying outside of Judaism. As liberal Jews, we do not want to revert back to the days when parents said Kaddish over their child who married a non-Jew, however we should not be so quick to reject every commandment without much thought of the consequences to our people. It is a grave situation that so many

mitzvot go through the cycle of skepticism and terse elimination like the reaction to the mitzvah of returning to the Land of Israel.

Within his work The Kuzari, Yehuda Halevi touches upon issues which are relevant to Jews living in these modern times. Halevi wants us to recognize that we must return to our roots and use the language that our ancestors spoke before us. He suggests that every single Jew must make their way to Israel. How to bring this suggestion to fruition is the goal of many current Jewish leaders living in the Diaspora and in Eretz Yisrael.

Torah is made more accessible with language. Israel provides a living breathing existing language that is an essential tool to unlock the meaning of Torah. American Jewish youth who prepare for B'nei Mitzvah no longer need to view Hebrew as an abstract Shakespearean language if they visit Israel. They can hear Hebrew spoken on the streets and at pubs. The calendar is a Jewish calendar which creates an awareness of the Jewish rituals for even the most secular Israelis -- hilonim. Instead of Christmas and Easter parties in school, Hanukah and Pesach misibot take place. In addition, Israelis receive bonuses from their jobs during Rosh Hashanah, not during Christmas. The national pride for this tiny country and the history that people can actually touch when they outline the crevices of the Kottel create a strong sense of kaddosh. This holiness is transmitted in Jewish values which are easier to uphold in the land that G-d has distinguished as sacred. Israel makes the practice of Jewish rituals and the commandments relevant.

Rav Kook firmly believes that the Land of Israel is inherently connected to Judaism and to the Jewish people. He strongly believes

that unless Jews living in the Galut do not yearn for Israel they will not survive as Jews spiritually and religiously. Rav Kook's teachings are completely relevant for today's liberal Jews. Israel can be a vehicle for an enhanced meaning of Judaism through its physicality, and its historical and political actuality. Israel is something tangible. We can touch the Kottel, we can climb Massada, we can feel our culture in our hands and our history under our feet.

"Next Year in Jerusalem." We need to make this abstract statement a concrete reality. We emphasize the observances of Brit Milah and B'nei Mitzvah. Another tradition to emphasize is a pilgrimage to Israel, so that Jews can have actual images of Jerusalem during Pesach.

According to Rav Kook, the mitzvot will expand in Israel where they originated. Al Shloshe D'varim, the world is made up of three things: Torah, Worship and Acts of Loving Kindness. These three abstract ideals can be made more tangible in Israel. Gemlut Hasadim is expressed through the Israeli family. I have a place in my Israeli family somewhat similar to the role I have with my immediate family in the States. And I am not alone. Many Jews are often surprised by the strong emotions they feel when reuniting with family in Israel.

When worship meets history the ancient and the modern become real experiences. Israel takes us back into history, to where G-d is felt. When I face East to pray, I often return to my memory of the Kottel. This is where our people observed.

We struggle with our belief in G-d. We struggle with what traditions we will or will not choose to practice. We should also

struggle with where Israel fits into our lives. Maybe all Jews should at one point or another have even a fleeting thought about making aliyah. Israel should be more than a topic for camps and religious schools, it needs to be part of Jewish struggles. Rav Kook believes that we must yearn to return to the Land of Israel. As Jews, we must ask ourselves how to arouse this yearning in the Jews living in the Diaspora. It is certainly difficult to yearn for a place where one has never been. For this reason, I think all programs which bring Jews to Israel should be encouraged. This yearning will strengthen Judaism and the Jewish people in the Galut.



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