



**THE JEW AND THE LAND**

**T**HERE IS A DEEP CONNECTION BETWEEN EVERY JEW AND THE LAND OF ISRAEL. It is a bond which extends back in time for thousands of years, and which is independent of the question whether the majority of the Jews at any particular time were actually living there. Wherever the Jew might be, he or she has a connection with the Holy Land.

This point is made in the Sedra<sup>1</sup> this week. G-d tells Abraham, the ancestor of the Jewish people, that he and his wife Sarah should leave their birthplace and go to the Land which G-d would show them.

When they get there, at first G-d says that “I will give this Land to your descendants”, expressed as something which will take place in the future. Later in the Sedra, G-d makes a pact with Abraham and tells him something more: “I *have given* this Land to your descendants”<sup>3</sup>. Rashi explains that G-d has *already* given the Land of Israel to Abraham’s descendants. In this context, who are Abraham’s descendants? When this blessing was given to him, he did not yet have any children. As the Torah narrative unfolds, we learn that the inheritors of the Land are his progeny through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob, as is affirmed by several verses in the Torah, such as ‘your seed will be considered from Isaac’<sup>4</sup>.

From G-d’s point of view, the Land belongs to them, even if they have not yet taken possession of the Land, as was the case in Abraham’s own time. The Land is also theirs even if they have

temporarily been driven out of it, as happened in later generations. The Holy Land continues to be the possession of the Holy People.

Here we come to the intriguing puzzle which is at the centre of the theme of the Holy Land. “Holy” means spiritual, sacred. But “Land” is something worldly, very physical, made of earth and rocks. How can “Land” be holy?

This is precisely the task of the Jewish people. They have to make the physical Land into something holy, thus transforming the “Land of Canaan” into the “Land of Israel”.

How do they do this? One aspect of their task, historically, is the fact that the Jewish people conquered the Land of Canaan and it became the Land of Israel. They then had the challenge to retain the Land, which sometimes has meant standing up to enemies who wish to push the holy people away from their ancient country. But another aspect has to do with the Jewish people in themselves.

Each individual is composed of a combination of two contrasting aspects: physical and spiritual. The physical dimension tries to dominate the person, exclusively. The spiritual dimension has to battle against this, sometimes in very subtle ways, in order to exert its own claim: that the person is indeed physical, but is also holy.

We thus see a struggle which takes place on two planes: the inner battle to be a more spiritual person, and the constant practical struggle to hold on to the sacred Land of Israel. The Sedra, reaching back thousands of years, tells us that ultimately the Land belongs to the Jews, and that they alone can fulfil the task to make the physical Land “holy”.

This means also that eventually, through the Jewish people, all families of the earth will be blessed<sup>5</sup>, and the whole world, with all its different nations, will also be filled with the knowledge of G-d. There will be not just a holy people, not just a holy Land, but a holy World<sup>6</sup>.

1. Genesis chs.12-17. 2. Gen. 12:7. 3.Gen. 15:18. See Rashi there. 4. Gen. 21:12. See also in our Sedra, 17:19, 21. Regarding Jacob, see Gen.28:13-15. 5. See Gen. 12:3, 28:14. 6. Based freely on the Lubavitcher Rebbe’s *Likkutei Sichot* vol.20, pp.308-311.

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SEDRA LECH LECHA

**FROM GLOOM TO LAUGHTER**

Adam leaned against the railing, watching his classmates play football. "Hey, Adam!" He looked up to see his friend Misha waving to him. "Come play with us." Adam shrugged and mouthed "no thanks".

Misha wondered what was bothering his usually cheerful friend. The last few days he had appeared very quiet and withdrawn. *'Maybe I'll walk home with him and find out what's the matter with him'*, he thought.

"Adam, one minute!" Misha jogged up alongside his classmate. "Can I walk home with you?" Adam nodded. "Sure".

"What's up?" asked Misha. "You've been pretty quiet lately".

Adam shrugged. "Nothing. Actually, my family is moving. To Manchester." Misha was shocked. The two boys had been together in the same class since they had begun school and had always been close friends. "Why?" was the only thing Misha could think of asking.

"Well, my father's business wants him to move to another part of the company, which is in Manchester. Everyone else in my family seems really happy about it - except me, of course. I'm the only one 'being difficult'." Adam mimicked his sister's voice, and grimaced. "My sister is really excited, she knows some of the girls from her new school, and she thinks it's going to be great. I guess I'm just really not in the mood. Also, it's very sudden, we'll be moving in three weeks."

Adam turned to Misha. "Go on, you always have something

positive to say. Tell me something cheerful". Adam looked quite serious, so Misha thought hard, but couldn't think of anything positive to say. He felt pretty bad himself. "Let me think about it," he said quietly.

They had reached Adam's home and the two boys parted, waving. Misha saw that Adam didn't look quite as glum as he had earlier. As Misha's mother often said, just speaking about a problem helps. This made Misha himself feel a bit better.

The following morning, during break time, Misha tapped Adam on the shoulder. "Hello Adam. I thought of something for you. Or rather my older sister Michal did."

Adam raised his eyebrows. "Go on then."

"Well" continued Misha, "Michal was saying that in this week's Sedra it speaks about Abraham leaving his hometown, and he's going to an unknown destination. G-d is planning to send him to the Land of Canaan, later to be the Land of Israel. But Abraham knows nothing. He and his wife pack everything up and off they go.

"But G-d gives Abraham all kinds of blessings. G-d promises him that he will become rich and famous. So," Misha's eyes had a wicked gleam, "Michal said I was to get your autograph now before you leave, because maybe later you'll be famous and won't be able to bother with ordinary people like me".

The two boys laughed.

"Oh yeah," added Misha, "she also said that Abraham, once he left his birthplace, was given the ability to bless other people. Before that only G-d could give blessings. Now Abraham had the power to give blessings as well. So maybe you could give me a couple of blessings for this Geography test?" The two boys walked inside the classroom, laughing.

Even Mr Robbins, the maths teacher, noticed Adam was in a better mood today.

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