

**BADERECH****RABBI JUDAH MISCHEL**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CAMP HASC
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Vayechi: Land of the Living

Late in the Summer of 1939, a Jew from Vienna enters the office of a local travel agency. Taking out a wad of cash, he whispers, “I would like to buy a one-way ticket to get out of here as soon as possible.”

“Where to?” Asks the clerk.

“Let me take a look at your globe please.”

The Yid starts examining the globe, identifying possible destinations around the world. Each time the Jew suggests a location, the agent raises an objection: this country has closed its borders, this one requires an entry visa, that one won’t admit Jews, the next has a waiting list a decade long, etc.

Facing the reality that there is nowhere to go, the Jew looks up with despair and says, “Maybe you have a different globe for me to choose from?”

“Vayechi Yaakov...And Yaakov lived seventeen years in Egypt.”(47:28)

Reunited with his family, Yaakov Avinu lives out the last chapter of his life in *Chutz laAretz*. In advance of their descent to Egypt, a land of idolatry and impurity, Hashem appeared to Yaakov Avinu *b’maros laila*, “in a night vision”. Our Sages explain this means he was gripped with fear by the impending darkness of Exile. The Netziv explains that Yaakov was concerned that his children and descendants would lose their moral bearings on foreign soil, and disconnected from the holiness of the Land of Israel, would not be able to perpetuate authentic *Yidishkeit*. The *Ribbono Shel Olam* assures Yaakov Avinu that our descent to Mitzrayim would be the next step in the fulfillment of the *Bris bein haBetarim*, “the Covenant of the Parts” witnessed by Avraham Avinu. The *Brit bein haBesarim* foretold not only exile, slavery and suffering, but a subsequent return to *Eretz C’naan* and inherit the Promised Land.

“I will walk before Hashem in the lands of the living.”(*Tehillim*, 116)

Rashi: “This refers to Eretz Yisrael.”

The Land of Israel is called *Eretz haChayim*, “The Land of the Living” (*Iyov*, 28). While Hashem had promised that his offspring would continue to exist, Yaakov was concerned that outside of Eretz Yisrael they would not be able to really live ‘*chayim*’, lives of spiritual depth and meaning. In *Chutz laAretz*, the world outside Israel, there can be physical ‘survival’, and there is even a level of existence called ‘living’. Yet, whatever semblance of real life and living that Yaakov was able to experience

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in Mitzrayim was drawn from Eretz Yisrael. Wherever a Jew expresses their Yidishkeit, learns Torah, fulfills a mitzvah, they are drawing from *kedushas Eretz Yisrael*, the eternal holiness rooted in Eretz Yisrael. This animates our temporary Jewish “life” in Chutz laAretz. Nevertheless, no matter how strong the *yeshivos*, kosher restaurants and communities of the modern equivalents of Goshen may be, we must always remember that “life” in Exile is a *chidush*, a novelty. Our descent and dwelling outside the Land is unnatural — and not *fully* alive.

Reb Nachman of Tcherin, a close disciple of Reb Noson Breslover explains: “An environment more ideal than the Chosen Land does not exist for the eternal development and growth of the Chosen People.” Eretz Yisrael is the source of *chiyus*, vitality and ‘aliveness’ for the whole world.

The recent resurgence of open, unabashed anti-semitism across the globe is far from shocking. Reminiscent of scenes that have been seared into our collective consciousness and memory for generations, we have seen this before! Exile from the Holy Land and the pain of *galus* is an essential part of our story; throughout the Torah and the books of the Nevi'im, we are repeatedly assured that Hashem would always be with us, even in a place of great darkness and suffering.

Our collective purpose is to reveal Godliness in the four corners of the world, to fill the world with light. We sacrifice for the sake of being *marbeh k'vod Shamayim*, increasing the honor of Heaven. We are living in extraordinary times. As the final stages of Galus and the next stages of Redemption unfold before our eyes, and *kibbutz galuyos*, the ingathering of the exiles is in full swing, we are reminded once again that the Chosen People are meant to be in



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the Promised Land. There is no “other globe”.

May Am Yisrael be blessed wherever we are, and wherever we are, may we be safe, and we all be connected to the Kedusha of Eretz Yisrael. And may we all be *baderech*, on our way back Home, to the Land of the Living.

“Wherever I am going, I am going to Eretz Yisrael.”

- Rebbe Nachman of Breslov ■

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