

A Torah Approach to Medinat Yisrael

My original connection with Medinat Yisrael was emotional. Having become active in a leadership role in B'nei Akiva in my post-high school years, I was enveloped by the strong feelings, dedication, and idealism of my peers.

Thus I was greatly impacted by a point made by my Rebbe, Rav Aharon Soloveichik zt"l in his weekly hashkafa shiur, Erev Shabbos *Ki Tetze*, 1971.

Rav Soloveichik discussed the mitzvah presented in that parsha:

לֹא תִהְיֶה קְדֻשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא יִהְיֶה קְדֻשׁ מִבְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

There shall not be a (female) harlot among the daughters of Israel and there shall not be a (male) harlot among the sons of Israel. (D'vorim 23:18)

In that context, he mentioned that there are Rishonim who hold that common-law marriages are a violation of this mitzvah (viz. *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot I'shut* 1:4). The statement that he then made is fresh in my mind even 45 years later:

“That marriages in the State of Israel must be according to halachah and civil marriages are not allowed is in itself a justification for the existence of the State.”

I was stunned. Rav Aharon Soloveichik was a dedicated Zionist. He saw the State of Israel as having utmost significance. He saw the establishment of the State of Israel as a miraculous event and thus recited Hallel (without



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a b'rachah) on Yom HaAtzmaut.

The State needed a justification for its existence?

It was that moment that I understood that emotional ties were insufficient. Emotional ties are significant when they are based on a solid intellectual foundation. Emotional attachment is significant when the Torah teaches us the inherent value of that attachment.

This principle may be learned from the teaching of Rambam regarding the mitzvah of *ahavat Hashem*, loving G-d. He writes (*Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2):

והיאך היא הדרך לאהבתו ויראתו, בשעה שיתבונן האדם במעשיו וברואיו הנפלאים הגדולים ויראה מהן חכמתו שאין לה ערך ולא קץ מיד הוא אוהב ומשבח ומפאר ומתאוה תאוה גדולה לידע השם...

How does one come to love and fear G-d? When one contemplates G-d's actions and His wondrous and great creations and perceives in them His infinite and immeasurable wisdom, he immediately loves and praises and has a great desire to know Hashem.

Does this mean that a person should not create emotional attachments without having first a firm Torah foundation? The answer is that a Torah foundation is not a prerequisite

for emotional attachments. The mitzvah of *kibbud av va'eim*, honoring one's parents, is, perhaps, the most powerful evidence. A child loves his parents. That is part of the nature of our beings. That love is wonderful and must be nurtured as the child grows. However, if the Torah Jew's relationship with her parents is based only on emotion, and without a foundation of the mitzvah of *kibbud av va'eim*, then that love, as sincere as it may be, will be expressed incorrectly.

Rashi points this out in *Parshas Kedoshim* (Vayikra 19:3), where he discusses the differing order in which the Torah places father and mother in the mitzvos of honoring and fearing one's parents. The different emotional ties that one may feel to this parent or the other are not related to the obligation of honoring or fearing them. The feelings may be natural, but they do not override the status that is conferred upon them by the mitzvah.

What then should be an appropriate way of understanding our connection, our concern, and our love of Medinat Yisrael? We can learn the appropriate progression from feelings to understanding from a verse in Tehillim (34:9):

טעמו וראו כי טוב ה' אשרי הנגר יקסה בו:

Taste and see that G-d is good; happy is the man who takes refuge in Him.

“Taste,” as explained by Malbim, refers to one’s individual perception. “See,” as used throughout Tanach, means understanding. The fledgling relationship with G-d as it develops in a child is one of emotion. Hashem is shown in His goodness, His kindness, and His salvation to a child whose worldview is simplistic. However, that is not the goal. The goal is to understand that it is worthwhile to take refuge in G-d and that such a choice is the most rational one that could be undertaken.

Without Torah-based knowledge, our appreciation of the gift of Medinat Yisrael will fall far short of the level that it should be. Without Torah-based knowledge, our ability to justify Medinat Yisrael to those who wish to deny its significance and to combat those who wish to bring it harm and grievous destruction will fall short of its goal.

But Torah knowledge alone is insufficient when dealing with matters that are part of history. In his commentary to Mishlei (22:12), the Vilna Gaon instructs the judge:

הדיין צריך לשני דברים...שיהיה בקי בתורה [ו] שיהיה בקי בישובו של עולם...

The judge requires two things. He must be an expert in Torah and an expert in the happenings of the world.

However, the purpose of our Torah knowledge is not only to defend Israel against its enemies. Torah knowledge allows us to identify what is right and what is wrong in Medinat Yisrael, that which requires our support and that which requires our opposition.

If we espouse the view that the State of Israel is a gift, then we must do our best to deserve and preserve that gift. If we espouse a view that Medinat Yisrael belongs to the Jewish People, then we must do our part to express our proprietary rights for its benefit and for ours.

Maharal writes in many places (*viz. Netzach Yisrael 31*) that our exile is not an inherent necessity. It is a *mikreh*, an event that is not part of our destiny. The reason that our golus continues is because of continued sin. But, Maharal continues, sin itself is not an inherent necessity; it, too, is a *mikreh*.

Our accumulation of Torah knowledge will allow us the insight to know what is correct in ourselves and in all that is precious to us so that we will merit מארבע ויקבץ נדחינו מארבע ויקבץ, the ingathering of the entire Jewish People and the ultimate fulfillment of the dream of the State of Israel.



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Meet Rachel Mirsky from White Plains, New York. A biology major on a pre-med track, and captain of the YU softball and basketball teams, Rachel chose YU to allow her to explore and develop her unique talents and interests.

Rachel loves YU because it enables her to engage in her extracurricular passions and prepare for her career while remaining true to her religious commitments. An exceptional athlete, Rachel was recently named to the Capital One Academic All-District team. Whether in an Israeli laboratory conducting research on the properties of red blood cells, or authoring a medical ethics paper on eating disorders and the Biblical matriarchs, Rachel can find the perfect balance at YU. This is the essence of Torah Umadda and what sets YU apart.

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