

# RAV SHAUL YISRAELI: THE IMPERATIVE TO LIVE IN ERETZ YISRAEL

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R. Shaul Yisraeli was one of the most prominent rabbis in the *Dati Leumi* community in Israel. He served as the rabbi of Moshav Kfar Haroeh, as a member of the Chief Rabbinate Council, as Rosh Yeshiva in Mercaz HaRav, and as president of the Eretz Chemdah Institute.

In his *Eretz Chemdah* (I:I:8), R. Yisraeli addresses the question of whether it is better to live in *Chutz la'Aretz* among people with higher religious standards or in Eretz Yisrael among people with lower religious standards. R. Yisraeli objects to the ruling of the *Avnei Nezer*, R. Avraham Borenstein (1838–1910), who wrote that when faced with this dilemma, the potential costs of living among people with lower religious standards outweigh the benefits of living in Eretz Yisrael.

R. Yisraeli agrees that living among people who are positive influences is extremely important and desirable. However, it is only the determining factor when considering options within Eretz Yisrael or within *Chutz la'Aretz*. Citing Rambam's ruling that "A person should always live in Eretz Yisrael, even in a city where most of the residents are idolaters, rather than live in *Chutz la'Aretz* in a city where most of the residents are Jewish"

(*Hilchos Melachim* 5:12; based on *Kesubos* 110b), R. Yisraeli argues that if it is better to live in Eretz Yisrael among idolaters, it is *certainly* better to live there among Jews with lower religious standards! Furthermore, according to the opinion of Ramban, living in Eretz Yisrael is a mitzvah, and one may not exempt oneself from fulfilling a mitzvah even if it is difficult.

R. Yisraeli considers the possibility that the ruling, "A person should always live in Eretz Yisrael, even in a city where most of the residents are idolaters..." is only directed to those already living in Eretz Yisrael, and not to people living in *Chutz la'Aretz*. However, Rambam rules in *Hilchos Ishus* 13:19, that a husband can compel his wife to move to Eretz Yisrael, even from a city where most of the residents are Jews to one where most of the residents are idolaters.

R. Yisraeli notes that if a person is very concerned that he will not have the ability to function normally in Eretz Yisrael, and as a result, will be constantly anxious, he may be exempt from the mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisrael, since according to R. Shlomo ben Shimon Duran (1400–1467), dwelling in Eretz Yisrael should be a



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*yeshivah shel shalvah* (a serene dwelling).

How, asks R. Yisraeli, can one spouse compel the other to move to Eretz Yisrael in a case in which one of them is worried that they will not be able to withstand potential negative influences of neighbors with lower religious standards? Why should this not be considered a valid claim? R. Yisraeli answers that perhaps this ruling assumes that the merit of dwelling in Eretz Yisrael will help prevent one from being influenced by wicked people, and that it is, in fact, more [spiritually] dangerous to live in *Chutz la'Aretz* where the "air is impure."