

Geulas Yisrael #54

Shavuot: The Geometry of Judaism

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Torah is everything. But how does it relate to other seminal values of Judaism? More specifically, what is the relationship between Torah, the land of Israel and the Jewish people. These values seem inseparable, as they are each cardinal aspects of religious identity. How can their relationship be described?

Many have suggested a metaphor which incorporates all three values into one inextricable "article". This approach views Torah, the Jewish people, and the land of Israel as comprising an indivisible *triangle*. Every triangle possesses three connected corners without which, the entire triangle would dismantle. No corner is more important than another. Similarly, Torah, the Jewish people and the land of Israel cannot be separated, nor can greater value be assigned to any of these fundamental tenets.

My Rebbe, Harav Yehuda Amital, sharply disagreed with the triangle metaphor. Instead, he imagined these three principles as three points on a continuous line. The sequencing of these values along the line, resembles their chronological order. On the 15<sup>th</sup> day of Nissan we were transformed from a clan of slaves into a Jewish nation. Pesach was both our day of Independence as well as the day we were born as a nation. Only seven weeks later, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of Sivan, we received the celestial word of Hashem delivered atop a trembling mountain. The birth of our nation preceded the delivery of Torah.

Without a nation willing to embrace it, Torah could not have descended into our orbit. Of course, Torah itself, as it is the will of Hashem is eternal, predates human history and is unaffected by human volition. However, for Torah to descend into the human realm and to affect human experience, it must be adopted and applied by humans. Until our nation was forged on Pesach, Torah had no place in this world. As the Jewish people are a precondition to Torah, they are the paramount value. *Am Yisrael* takes precedence to *Torat Yisrael*.

In a similar vein, the values of Jewish peoplehood and of Torah take precedence to settling the land of Israel. Our initial itinerary had us voyaging to Israel a few

weeks after receiving the Torah at Sinai. Sadly, we rerouted history and squandered forty years before reaching that milestone. However, the delay didn't alter the fundamental sequence: first a people, then a Torah, and, finally, a land.

Until we received the Torah, we had no warrant to the land. After liberating us from Egypt, Hashem revealed His direct Word so that we could model a lifestyle of commandment and commitment to an entire world. We are selected to live under the eye of Hashem, in his backyard, so that we could disseminate His message from His province. Without fidelity to Torah, our deed to the land of Israel is rescinded. Torah precedes the land of Israel. It was delivered first and is a precondition for our entry into the land.

The three values are indispensable but aren't of equal value. A line not a triangle.

For thousands of years, we crafted religious identity based on two of these values. During the harsh exile, we excelled at Torah study and, remarkably, we maintained a sturdy national identity. Sadly, however, the third cardinal value- the land of Israel- remained a distant dream.

With our return to history, the land of Israel has come alive. We have rediscovered new mitzvot, have become reacquainted with Israel's landscapes, and have begun the arduous process of settling and inhabiting a land which had been vacant for centuries. We have rediscovered the "missing" third part of this "bundle" of Jewish identity.

Over the past 50 years in particular, the struggle to settle our land has captivated our collective imagination. We are no longer settling the coast or the north, but are now laying new roots in ancient Biblical fields. We have now returned to Yerushalayim and the surrounding Biblical corridor. We are literally walking back into Tanach. International opposition to our presence in these regions merely reinforces the prophetic nature of our settlements. We are living through a historical faceoff, pivoted upon a city which sits at the center of human history. Without passion, courage and sacrifice we will not triumph.

Have we gone too far? Have we ignored other values? Have we overinvested in land settlement at the cost of prior values? Have we unleashed a golem which has turned back on its master with an insatiable appetite? If Jewish peoplehood, Torah and the land of Israel are a triangle this question is mute. Investment in one

"corner" affects all corners. By settling Israel we are bolstering our peoplehood and strengthening Torah commitment. If, however, the three values are a line, this question becomes very troubling. Have we placed too much emphasis upon "derivative" parts of Judaism at the expense of "origin" or "source" components?

Have we been sufficiently sensitive to social issues which affect *am Yisrael*? We are deeply committed to the spiritual nature of Israeli society, paying heed to national religious issues such as Shabbat, kashrut, and conversion. However, we may have neglected larger national agendas such as social welfare, economic equality, and the general moral tone of our surrounding culture. While religious people have largely ignored these agendas, they have been eagerly adopted by secular factions. Did we prioritize land over people? Did we invert the sequence of the "line"?

There may be an additional cost to our disproportionate concern with the land of Israel. Apparently, Torah study and Torah commitment have also been insufficiently attended to. With great sadness, we have witnessed outsized percentages of a younger generation opting out of classic orthodox identity. It is always dangerous to generalize and there are a myriad of factors driving this distressing phenomenon. But it is fair to ask whether we have placed sufficient emphasis upon Torah study and halachik commitment. Perhaps we overinvested communal resources in settling the land at the expense of the study and evaluation of Torah. Interestingly, many who abandon classic religious behavior still maintain deep commitment to land and its settlement. Is this a reflection of our community's passionate devotion to land, but listless commitment to Torah? Did the younger generation sense what was "truly" important to us?

*Am Yisrael, Torah and Land: a line, not a triangle.*