

## Geulas Yisrael #64

### How to Live Outside the Land of Israel

Moshe Taragin

No human being who ever lived deserved entry into the land of Israel more than Moshe. Decades earlier, he had stoked the imagination of dejected slaves by depicting a faraway promised land. He endured forty maddening years of constant whining and shocking cowardice, watching an ungrateful nation spurn a divine invitation to the future. Watching his flock slowly debase over four decades, he, never abandoned hope of one day reaching his land of hope and dreams. No one in history deserved passage to Israel more than he did, but, tragically, his dream was about to end.

In a heart-rending scene, this legendary leader, ascends a mountain precipice to lovingly survey a territory which would forever remain a "land beyond reach". Condemned by a crushing divine sentence, Moshe was buried in a nondescript mountain tomb, while his successor, Yehoshua, piloted our epic passage into the land of history.

Facing this devastating punishment, Moshe petitions furiously for clemency. By one account, he bid five hundred prayers for reconsideration. The anatomy of our *shmoneh esrei* is structured upon the template of Moshe's frantic prayers. The image of this great man, standing atop the cliffs of Moab, merely hoping to caress the stones of Israel, is one of the most heartrending scenes in Jewish history. No human is exempt from accountability before God, even the greatest to ever live.

#### A Final argument

Moshe presents one final compelling argument. Throughout the desert years, he tirelessly hauled the bones of Yosef. During our frenzied departure from Egypt, the newly-emancipated slaves were too pre-occupied collecting Egyptian wealth to attend to Yosef's casket. No one had the "bandwidth" to fulfill an ancient promise to a grandfather none had ever personally met. On that busy day of liberation, despite his massive workload, Moshe personally retrieved Yosef's coffin. Moreover, during the forty-year desert odyssey, he personally towed this

coffin, rather than delegating its maintenance to a porter. Despite the potential complications of becoming halachikally impure, Moshe kept the bones of Yosef “on his person”, or, at very least, in his immediate vicinity.

Here lies Moshe's final “prayer strategy”. Yosef’s bones were designated to be buried in Shechem, the city personally awarded his tribe by Ya'akov. Moshe begs for entry into Israel as the “pall bearer” of Yosef’s coffin. Even if he isn’t personally deserving, shouldn’t he be granted passage into Israel to bury the remains of Yosef which he had so lovingly supervised? If Yosef enters why shouldn't Moshe?

### Identifying with Israel

Hashem's rejection of this last-ditch plea is both striking and harsh. Though Yosef's bones can pass, Moshe cannot. Yosef can enter since he “accredited” Israel or, as the midrash writes, הוּדָה בְּאַרְצוֹ. Moshe is blocked because his life wasn’t “Israel-calibrated” to the same degree as Yosef's was. Though neither Yosef nor Moshe actually inhabited the land -in Yosef’s case he was absent from the land his entire adult life- their relationship with the land was vastly different. Neither settled the land, but Yosef lived with greater Israel consciousness than Moshe did. For this reason, he entered, and Moshe did not.

At some point, both Moshe and Yosef faced similar questions about their Jewish or Israeli identity. Yosef, when falsely accused of crimes against his master’s wife reports: “I was grabbed from the "house of the Jews" " accentuating that, though he is currently imprisoned in Egypt, his true alliances lie elsewhere. By contrast, Moshe is introduced to Yitro by his rescued daughters as an “Egyptian man”. He doesn’t dispute this designation, but accedes to being labelled as an Egyptian. Following Yosef’s example, he should have insisted that, though, his culture, language and dress appeared Egyptian, he belonged elsewhere – in the land of the Jews. His deafening silence at this misidentification reflects diminished identification with Israel, disqualifying him from entry during his life and, even from burial after his death.

### Living Israel from Afar

This contrast between Yosef’s profound identification with Israel and Moshe’s lesser devotion, provides an important model for the modern era. The doors of

history have suddenly swung open, offering the long dreamed-for opportunity of a national return home. Yet, life is complex and many Jews, genuinely yearning for life in Israel, are wedged into situations comparable to Yosef and Moshe's condition. Each of these pioneers of history longed to be in Israel, but each played pivotal historical roles outside the boundaries of our homeland.

Geographical resettlement to Israel sometimes lies beyond our reach and beyond our best, but limited, human abilities. Though actual emigration to Israel may be not always be attainable, emotional identification with Israel lies squarely within the reach of each Jewish imagination. Not every Jew merits treading upon the stones and sand which Yehuda Halevi sang about, however, every Jew possesses the ability to “belong” to their homeland, even from afar.

### Attitude and Actions

Affiliation with Israel from afar must be achieved both "attitudinally" as well as through active engagement. A Jew must embrace his current situation and advance whichever community they currently inhabit. Dreaming of a "different place" shouldn't dislodge a Jew from opportunities in, and responsibilities to their current locale. Though accepting a current "reality" is heroic, distilling that reality as “ideal” is historically myopic. It takes great emotional maturity to excel within a current "situation", while still acknowledging that condition as imperfect. Jews are always tasked with this “dual processing” regardless of where they live. Even Jews in Israel, embedded in their homeland, are charged with appreciating our renewed State, while acknowledging the gap between our impressive achievements, and the more comprehensive but still elusive Messianic ideal. Likewise, a Jew who resides beyond Israel's borders must bifurcate: accept and improve current "homes", while passionately yearning for our ultimate homeland.

Israel affiliation requires more than just longing for a more ideal life in Israel. It demands that every Jew engage in the affairs and events of Israel, its culture and its struggle. Without question, it is ‘easier’ to identify with Israel during a national crisis, but sometimes, awareness and engagement in pedestrian day-to-day Israeli experience fashions a more natural and more holistic identification with our land. Sensitivity to the “world of Israel” binds identity to that “other place”, where we may not live, but to which we certainly belong.

It is deeply symbolic that, like Yosef, so many who never fully resided in Israel enjoy the benefit of burial in our country. If Jews aim to replicate Yosef after death, they should certainly aspire to reproduce his life of “Israel awareness”. Some of us are afforded the privilege to live *in* Israel, while every Jew across the globe must endeavor to *live Israel*.