
THE JEWISH VISION OF SPIRITUALITY IV

Spirituality in Space & Beyond

In the first three Morasha shiurim, we defined and illustrated Jewish spirituality as the development and strengthening of an eternal relationship with God. We learned further that the framework for Jewish spirituality is comprehensive; our spirituality is expressed through mitzvot in three spheres: *Bein Adam L'Makom* – Between Man and God, *Bein Adam L'Atzmo* – Personal Growth, and *Bein Adam L'Chavero* – Concern for Others and Interpersonal Relationships. Within this framework, we saw that the dimension of time is our most precious resource – it contains the opportunity to infuse each moment with enormous transcendent meaning. Moreover, time *itself* flows within a dynamic Jewish calendar containing cycles of Shabbat, festival days and even weeks that are imbued with vast holiness, offering diverse powerful modes of spiritual expression.

In this fourth shiur on spirituality, we will explore how certain places (the Land of Israel), structures (synagogues) and even objects (Torah scroll, tefillin, and mezuzah) can be imbued with holiness and are a means for building a spiritual connection to God. Finally, this class addresses how spiritual development and expression in one's lifetime can create an eternal spiritual existence in the World to Come.

In this class we will address the following questions:

- ☞ If God is everywhere, why is Israel more holy than other lands?
- ☞ Is it possible for other lands to achieve holiness too?
- ☞ How do physical objects acquire sanctity?
- ☞ How can spiritual development in one's lifetime create an eternal spiritual existence in the World to Come?

Class Outline

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SECTION I: SPIRITUALITY IN THE WORLD – THE LAND OF ISRAEL

Spirituality presents itself to us not only through the medium of time, but also through space. Even though God is everywhere, there are some places in the world that are more conducive to connecting with God than others. In this section we will explore the expression of spirituality in our world, and particularly how it manifests itself in the Land of Israel.

As an introduction to this section, the following is a moving account of the Jewish people's attachment to the Land of Israel.

On the Tel Aviv street next to the Sadigerer Shul (synagogue), an elderly Yemenite Jew worked diligently, sweeping the street. He worked quickly and methodically, sweeping first one side of the street and then the other. When he approached the entrance to the shul, however, he stopped sweeping and passed by the building with his broom aloft. Then he continued sweeping the road.

My grandfather, Rabbi Chaskel Besser, who resided in Tel Aviv at the time and frequented the shul, noticed this odd behavior and wondered about it. He approached the street cleaner and asked him how come he had not swept in front of the shul.

The gentleman looked at my grandfather. "The rabbi doesn't allow me to."

My grandfather's curiosity was aroused, and he approached the Sadigerer Rebbe and asked for an explanation, but the rabbi only smiled. My grandfather asked again, and then again, until finally, the rabbi told his story.

The rabbi had been visiting Vienna in 1938 when the Nazis entered Vienna. They immediately sought out the prominent Jews and arrested them, among them the Sadigerer Rebbe.

In a chilling hint of the humiliation and degradation which they intended to visit upon the Jews, they took these Jewish leaders and found different ways to publicly disgrace them. The Sadigerer Rebbe, a man of regal bearing and conduct, was given a little brush and stood in front of the great Vienna Opera House. They placed a small street cleaner's hat on his head, and ordered him to sweep the stairs of the building with this ridiculously ineffective brush.

As this holy rabbi stooped on those ornate steps, tears streaming down his cheeks, he whispered a prayer, and a vow, to God:

"Almighty, save me from these beasts. Lead me out of this country and to your home, the Land of Israel. And I promise that there I will sweep the streets with delight and gratification."

The rabbi smiled at my grandfather. "Thus, I insist that the street cleaner leave those precious few yards of sidewalk, the entrance to God's house, for me to sweep." (Yisroel Besser, "On the Streets of Tel Aviv" in his book Warmed by Their Fire, www.innernet.org.il)

Why do the Jewish people have such a heartfelt connection with the Land of Israel?

The answer is that the Land of Israel is set apart from the other lands of the world in a number of ways: (1) God maintains a special relationship with the Land of Israel that makes it a more spiritually intense and holy place; (2) there are many mitzvot that may only be fulfilled in the Land of Israel; and (3) because God has designated the Land of Israel as a special place for the Jewish people, they have a unique bond to the Land.

PART A. GOD'S COUNTRY

The Land of Israel is specifically dedicated to God, and it is a place where His "focus" is more intense. As such, it is a place where Divine intervention in everyday affairs (*hashgachah pratit*) is more easily recognized.

We find in Tanach (the Bible) that the Land of Israel is called God's land.

1. Shmuel (Samuel) I 26:19 (as interpreted in Talmud Bavli, Ketubot 110b) – The Land of Israel is called "the Lord's heritage."

...for they have driven me today from cleaving to the Lord's heritage...

...כי גרשוני היום מהסתפח בנחלת יקוק...

2. Yoel (Joel) 4:2 – The Land of Israel is called God's land.

I will gather all the nations and I will take them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and I will contend with them there concerning My people and My heritage, Israel, which they scattered among the nations, and **My land** they divided.

וקבצתי את כל הגוים והורדתי אל עמק יהושפט
ונשפטי עמם שם על עמי ונחלתי ישראל אשר פזרו
בגוים ואת ארצי חלקו:

For other places in Tanach where the Land of Israel is connected specifically to God, see Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, *The Kuzari* 2:14.

While, of course, "the whole world and everything therein belongs to God" (*Tehillim/Psalms* 24:1), nevertheless He maintains a special relationship with the Land of Israel.

3. **Devarim (Deuteronomy) 11:12 – God's involvement with the Land of Israel is more intense.**

A land that the Lord your God scrutinizes constantly; the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year until the end of the year.

ארץ אשר יקוק אלהיך דרש אתה תמיד עיני יקוק
אלהיך בה מרשית השנה ועד אחרית שנה:

4. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Siftei Chaim, Mo'adim, Vol. 3, p. 34 – God's personal intervention is more easily recognized in the Land of Israel, and it is easier to attain closeness to Him there.**

It is true that the eyes of God are focused on the whole world; nevertheless, compared to the rest of the world, we recognize God's personal intervention in everyday affairs (*hashgachah pratit*) in a more pronounced way in the Land of Israel. This is what is meant by the verse: "A land that the Lord your God scrutinizes constantly..." (Devarim 11:12).

This is the special power of the Land of Israel: it grants the opportunity for greater closeness to the Holy One, and it teaches us about God's intervention in everyday affairs. For this reason prophecy is only possible in the Land of Israel [or for its sake, Kuzari 2:14] ...

הן אמת שעיני ה' משוטטות בכל הארץ, בכל אופן
בא"י מכירים את השגחת הקב"ה בצורה בולטת יותר
מאשר בחו"ל. שנאמר "ארץ אשר ה' אלהיך דרש
אותה תמיד עיני ה' אלהיך בה מראשית השנה ועד
אחרית שנה" (דברים יא, יב).

זוהי סגולת א"י שנותנת את האפשרות של קירבה
יתירה אל הקב"ה, ומלמדת את ההשגחה הפרטית.
מטעם זה רק בא"י שורה הנבואה ...

Ramban explains the metaphysics behind God's relationship to the various lands of the world. The different lands of the world are administered by angels appointed by God. The only land that is ruled directly by God Himself is the Land of Israel. This fact accounts for its unique holiness.

5. **Ramban on Vayikra (Leviticus) 18:25 – Events in the Land of Israel are orchestrated directly by God, and not by an intermediary angel.**

Although everything is for the sake of His glorious Name, in lands outside the Land of Israel, purity is incomplete, since in those lands there are celestial angels [that act as intermediaries between God and the world]...

...and this is the meaning of the Sages' statement: "Anyone who lives outside the Land is comparable to one who has no God" [Ketubot 110b]...

...and so they stated in the *Tosefta*, "While you are in the Land of Israel, I will be a God unto you; if you are not in the Land of Israel, it is as if I am not a God unto you."

והנה בחוצה לארץ, אע"פ שהכל לשם הנכבד, אין
טהרה בה שלימה, בעבור המשרתים המושלים עליה
...

...והוא מאמרם (כתובות קי): כל הדר בחוצה לארץ
דומה כמי שאין לו אלוה...

ואמרו בתוספתא דע"ז (פ"ה ה"ה) ... כל זמן שאתם
בארץ כנען הייתי לכם לאלהים, אין אתם בארץ כנען
כביכול אין אני לכם לאלהים.

The holiness of the land and the closeness to God it engendered made Israel the springboard for prophecy,

the ultimate in spiritual experiences.

6. Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, Kuzari 2:14 – The Land of Israel is the only place for prophecy.

Anyone who received prophecy only did so in the Land or on account of it.

כל מי שנתנבא לא נתנבא כי אם בה או בעבורה.

(See further the Morasha shiur on Prophets and Prophecy I, Section III.) It is this quality of holiness and closeness to God that distinguishes the Land of Israel from all others. It has been these qualities, not its physical virtues, that have made the Land of Israel a focal point of interest throughout history.

7. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Commentary to Bereishit (Genesis) 14:1 – The Land demonstrates its spiritual nature despite its vulnerability and physical disadvantages.

...The land where [Avraham] dwelled had now been promised to him for the future of his people, and the first experience he had there was famine and the second was war. Neither material abundance nor political independence was inherent in the land itself. In both it stood in the most complete contrast to Egypt. Just as its fertility was entirely dependent on rain, and it had to look above to the heavens for its harvests, so was its political position such that it could offer no natural resistance to invaders. Left to itself, the land of Israel lay open to famine and political dependence. Situated in the cockpit of the world, where Europe, Asia, and Africa meet, hardly any world war has occurred into the bitter suffering of which it has not been drawn.

And just because of this was it chosen. If, in spite of all this, in this land a national life would blossom against which no national conqueror would dare attack, even if three times each year its borders were left open and all military defense withdrawn – if all the kingdoms of the world would clash together there and make war on each other, but no sword would dare enter this blooming and yet defenseless land – then the eternal fact would have been brought to the eyes of the nations: “here God lives!”

PART B. THE LAND OF MITZVOT

As we discussed in the first class of this series, the way we connect to God is through performing the mitzvot. In this regard the Land of Israel takes on special significance for it is the ideal vehicle for performing the mitzvot of the Torah. Not only are there many mitzvot that can only be kept in the Land, but even those not tied to the Land only achieve their full purpose when performed there. Since the Land of Israel is both set apart from other lands and dedicated to the purpose of drawing closer to God in this way, it is described as being holier than the rest of the world.

1. Mishnah, Kaylim 1:6-9 – The Land of Israel is holy in that it has been designated for the performance of mitzvot; its holiness increases relative to the sanctity of the mitzvot performed in specific places.

There are ten places that have holiness; The Land of Israel is holier than all the other lands. What is its *kedushah* (holiness)? The *omer* (barley offering), *bikurim* (offering of the first fruits) and the two breads are brought from it and are not brought from the other lands...Walled cities inside Israel are holier than the [rest of the] Land of Israel...The area inside the walls of Jerusalem is holier, the section of the Temple for Kohanim (Priests) is even holier, the Kadosh Hakadoshim

ארץ ישראל מקודשת מכל הארצות ומה היא קדושתה שמביאים ממנה העומר והבכורים ושתי הלחם מה שאין מביאים כן מכל הארצות... עיירות המוקפות חומה מקודשות ממנה... לפני מן החומה מקודש מהם... עזרת הכהנים מקודשת ממנה... קדש הקדשים מקודש מהם שאין נכנס לשם אלא כהן גדול ביום הכפורים בשעת העבודה.

(Holy of Holies) is the holiest, for only the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) enters there on Yom Kippur at the time of the Divine Service.

2. **Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Mitzvot HaShakulot, p. 108 – Many mitzvot can only be kept in the land of Israel.**

Of the 248 positive mitzvot, there are 130 that can only be kept in the Land of Israel; of the 365 negative mitzvot, there are 132 that are prohibited specifically in the Land of Israel.

מרמ"ח מ"ע קשורות מאה ושלושים מצוות לארץ ישראל שרק בה אפשר לקיים אותן, משם"ה מצוות ל"ת ישנן מאה ושלושים ושתים שאנו נוהרים עליהם רק בארץ ישראל.

The fact that so many mitzvot can only be kept in the Land of Israel shows that all the mitzvot have a special relationship to the Land.

3. **Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet, Responsa of Rashba 1:134 – All the mitzvot are fundamentally attached to the Land of Israel.**

The Land (of Israel) is fundamental to all the mitzvot of the Torah, so much so that there are even mitzvot that are only kept there.

ועיקר מצוות התורה כולן בארץ הן עד כי כמה מצוות אין נוהגות כלל אלא בארץ.

4. **Ramban, Commentary to Vayikra 18:25 – All the mitzvot only achieve their full effect when performed in the Land of Israel.**

The main aspect of all the mitzvot is fulfilled only by those who dwell in the Land of God. That is why the Midrash Sifri states in connection with the verse, "When you have occupied it and you live there, you must carefully keep (all the rules and laws that I am prescribing to you today)" (Devarim 11:31-32): Living in the Land is equivalent to keeping all the mitzvot in the Torah.

עיקר כל המצוות ליושבים בארץ ה' ולפיכך אמרו בספרי (ראה פ), וירשתם אותה וישבתם בה ושמרתם לעשות (דברים יא לא לב), ישיבת ארץ ישראל שקולה כנגד כל המצוות שבתורה.

Finally, there is one mitzvah observed in the Land of Israel that reflects how the holiness of the land itself is also impacted by time. This mitzvah is called *Shemitta* (Sabbatical), and its observance has a momentous impact on Jewish belief.

5. **Vayikra 25:1-7 – Work the fields for six years, but not in the seventh. The seventh year harvest is *hefker*, ownerless; it is available to everyone.**

God said to Moses at Mount Sinai: "Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: 'When you enter the Land that I give you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath to God. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, בְּהַר סִינַי לֵאמֹר. דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם, כִּי תָבֹאוּ אֶל-הָאָרֶץ, אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם – וְשָׁבַתָה הָאָרֶץ, שְׁבַת לַיהוָה. שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שָׂדֶךְ, וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמֹר כֶּרֶמְךָ; וְאָסַפְתָּ, אֶת-תְּבוּאָתָהּ. וּבַשְּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית, שְׁבַת שְׂבַתוֹן יְהוָה לָאָרֶץ – שְׁבַת, לַיהוָה: שָׂדֶךְ לֹא תִזְרַע, וְכֶרֶםְךָ לֹא תִזְמֹר.

Sabbath rest, a Sabbath unto God. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself, or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. Whatever the land yields during the Sabbath year will be food for you – for yourself, your male and female servants, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.

את ספיח קצירך לא תקצור, ואת-ענבי נזירך לא תבצר:
שנת שבתון, יהיה לארץ. והיתה שבת הארץ לכם,
לאכלה – לך, ולעבדך ולאמנתך; ולשכירך, ולתושבך,
הגרים, עמך. ולבהמתך – ולחיה, אשר בארצך: תהיה
כל-תבואתה, לאכל.

For six years, we are permitted to engage in all agricultural processes for commercial or personal consumption. However, each seventh year (as well as each fiftieth year of this cycle [the *Yovel* (Jubilee) – the year after seven times seven years of this cycle], it is forbidden both to plant for any purpose and to harvest commercially. The land becomes ownerless – *hefker* – and everyone, rich and poor alike – have the same rights to collect food for their sustenance. Since God commands us not to plant in the seventh year (and during the *Yovel*, throughout the forty-ninth and fiftieth years), we are dependent on God to provide enough food in the sixth year to sustain us throughout the seventh and eighth years! This mitzvah teaches us and helps us integrate the centrality of having faith in God, Who supervises over our lives and takes care of our every need.

6. **Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Insights on Parshat Behar p. 1 – Just as there is a Shabbat in time, there is a Shabbat in space – Shemittah.**

The Torah links Shemittah to the Sabbath. Just like there is a Sabbath in time, there is a Sabbath in space – this is Shemittah, the Sabbath of the Holy Land. Shabbat in time testifies that God created the world. Shemittah actualizes our faith that God, the Creator, looks after us at each and every moment.

Shemittah is one big act of faith. Three years of crops are affected by Shemittah. Yet, in a remarkable statement, God promises us that we will have enough to eat during this entire period. We are asked to believe that not only is our food for this time placed completely beyond human effort, but that our very existence in the Holy Land is dependent on us keeping Shemittah.

Why does the Torah make specific reference to the mitzvah of Shemittah in the context of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai? After all, all of the mitzvot were taught by God to Moshe on Mount Sinai! One reason is to highlight that just as the details regarding Shemittah were taught by God to Moshe on Mount Sinai, so too were the particulars of all of the mitzvot. (See Rashi, Vayikra 25:1).

A second reason the Torah underscores the giving of the mitzvah of Shemittah at Mount Sinai is to emphasize that just like Shemittah teaches us faith in God, so too the purpose of *every* mitzvah is to strengthen our faith in God.

7. **Netivot Shalom, Parshat Behar, p. 117 – Since Sinai is the basis of Jewish faith, mentioning Shemittah in this context reflects onto every mitzvah.**

The foundation of the entire Torah and the mitzvot is to instill faith in God; this is the First of the Ten Commandments...

It is written [Tehillim 119:86], "All of your mitzvot are faith," meaning the soul of the

היסוד דכל התורה והמצוות הוא ענין האמונה, שזו
היתה הדברה הראשונה מעשרת הדברות ...

והנה כתיב (תהלים קיט) כל מצותיך אמונה, נשמת כל
התורה וכל המצוות היא האמונה, השורש הכללי של

entire Torah and [the purpose of] all of the mitzvot is to instill faith. Besides this, each mitzvah itself provides its own special perspective in contributing to the mitzvah in having faith in God.

The mitzvot were stated at Sinai, meaning that the revelation of faith that was instilled at Mount Sinai is the foundation of all the mitzvot. However, the mitzvah of Shemittah plays an especially prominent role in teaching us about having faith [which reflects on all the other mitzvot].

המצוות הוא ענין האמונה, ומלבד זה יש לכל מצוה ענין פרטי, היינו ענין סגולי המיוחד למצוה זו...

ונאמרו מסיני, שגילוי האמונה שהיה בהר סיני הוא שורש כל המצוות כללותיהן ופרטותיהן כל מצותך אמונה. אך מיוחדת מצות שמיטה שהיא השיא במדרגת האמונה...

Moreover, Shemittah teaches us that the entirety of our endeavors is dependent on having faith in God and recognizing His Divine Providence.

8. Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Insights on Parshat Behar. pp. 3, 7 – Shemittah teaches us that God is involved in every aspect of our lives.

It is easy for even those who believe in God, to imagine that somehow He has withdrawn from this or that arena. We talk of the laws of economics or sociology, of nature and nurture, of physics and chemistry as if somehow these laws are no longer subject to the guiding Hand of God. Does God really care whether I put on a light, or whether I made a business deal with just a slight embellishment of my sales pitch? To this God answers, “The leap of faith you will take during Shemittah will teach you that I am involved in every aspect of the creation. I will feed you without your making any effort towards your own sustenance. I will be the Plower and the Reaper...”

No natural law of agriculture could ever have dictated a Shemittah. Common sense farming would determine that lands lay fallow every second year, using alternating fields to ensure crop continuity. To work land for six years and then desist for a full year seems foolhardy. Indeed, since the Torah-mandated Shemittah required a phasing out of farming starting one month before (תוספת שביעית), an extension instituted by the rabbis, and there was a lag time after Shemittah, until crops could be planted and then reaped, we are talking about almost two years. When Yovel followed Shemittah, this would come to three years!

Had Moses made the Torah up, and claimed that it was God given, he would have been caught out the first time a Shemittah-Yovel cycle came around, if not the first Shemittah year, when mass starvation would have exposed him as a fraud. Indeed, if Moses was *Chas VeShalom* (God forbid) a fraud, he would not have been so unwise as to include a Shemittah law to begin with. Yet, God does anticipate that we will be challenging Him on this and delivered, again and again. Not once did Jews who kept Shemittah die for lack of food. Not once did their great leap of faith, to open their fields to all comers without any expectation of any repayment, fail to teach them, in a tangible way, that God is looking after us.

PART C. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE JEWISH PEOPLE AND THE LAND

As noted above, the Jewish people – the people of the mitzvot – have a special relationship with the Land of Israel – the land of the mitzvot. This relationship has been expressed throughout history by the greatest of our leaders; it was expressed by Avraham when he first journeyed to the Land, and it was expressed by

Moshe (Moses) when he prayed feverishly to be granted the privilege of entering it. The Sages of the Talmud would kiss the ground upon entering the Land.

1. Talmud Bavli, Ketubot 112a & 112b – The Sages of the Talmud expressed their love of the Land.

Rabbi Abba would kiss the cliffs of Acco (Acre).
Rabbi Chanina would fix its roads... Rabbi Chiya bar Gamda would roll in its dust...

ר' אבא מנשק כיפי דעכו. ר' חנינא מתקן מתקליה ...
ר' חייא בר גמדה מיגנדר בעפרה.

A few months before Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (the Netziv) passed away in 1893, the Carmel Mizrahi wine company opened a commissary store in Warsaw. The Netziv was given one of the first bottles of the newly made wine as a gift. As they brought the Netziv the wine, he said, "Wait one minute." Slowly, and with great effort and difficulty the elderly Rosh Yeshiva went back into his room and emerged adorned in his Shabbat clothing.

All of those who had gathered around were stunned by this unexpected behavior. The Netziv, seeing their perplexed looks, smiled and softly said, "Rabosai (Gentlemen), we are about to partake of the first wine made in Eretz Yisroel in almost two thousand years. Is this not a time for rejoicing? After all does not the prophet say 'And it shall come to pass on that day that the mountains shall drip with wine, and the hills shall flow with milk' (Yael 4:18)? How can I not rejoice and put on Shabbos clothing when I am privileged to see the 'mountains once again drip with wine'?" (Rabbi Ron Yitzchok Eisenmann, The Elephant in the Room, Mosaica Press, pp. 54-55.)

2. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, Mitzvot HaShakulot, p. 51 – The Land is central to the Jewish mission of bringing holiness into the world.

God made a covenant with Avraham Avinu: "I will sustain My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations, an eternal covenant..." (Bereishit 17:7). And what was the covenant? "That I will be a God to you and to your offspring after you. To you and your offspring I will give the land where you are now living as a foreigner. The whole land of Canaan shall be [your] eternal heritage, and I will be a God to [your descendants]." (ibid. 8)

Rashi adds: There I will be a God unto you, but a Jew that lives outside of Israel is like one who has no God. "God [then] said to Avraham, 'As far as you are concerned, you must keep My covenant - you and your offspring throughout their generations. This is My covenant between Me and you and your offspring that you must keep: You must circumcise every male.' God connected the covenant of the Land together with the covenant of circumcision. [Circumcision –] the foundation of the holiness of the Jewish people – [is linked to] the covenant of the Land – for the mission of the Jewish people is the dwelling of the Divine Presence, "to be a God unto you." The holiness of the body in relation to mankind and the holiness

הקב"ה כרת בריתו עם אאע"ה: (בראשית י"ז):
"והקמתי את בריתי ביני ובינך ובין זרעך אחריו לדרתם
לברית עולם", ומזהו הברית – "להיות לך לאלקים
ולזרעך אחריו (ח) ונתתי לך ולזרעך אחריו את ארץ
מגריך את כל ארץ כנען לאחוזת עולם והייתי להם
לאלקים".

רש"י (ח) לאחוזת עולם - ושם אהיה לכם לאלקים
אבל (בר ישראל) הדר בחוצה לארץ כמו שאין לו
אלוק". (ט) ויאמר אלקים אל אברהם ואתה את
בריתי תשמר אתה וזרעך אחריו לדרתם. (י) זאת
בריתי אשר תשמרו ביני וביניכם ובין זרעך אחריו
המול לכם כל זכר". כך הקב"ה את ברית ארץ ישראל
עם ברית המילה – יסוד קדושת ישראל, וברית הארץ
– תכלית עם ישראל שהיא השראת השכינה "להיות
לכם לאלקים". קדושת הגוף באדם וקדושת הארץ
בעולם זה היסוד והתכלית.

of the Land in relation to the world – these are the foundation and the purpose.

3. **Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, Kuzari 2:10-12 – The Land of Israel is fertile ground for the cultivation of the Jewish people.**

It should not strike you as strange how one land can be distinguished in a certain regard from other lands. You see for yourself how some places cultivate certain types of vegetation and not others, or is richer in a certain mineral, or is better for a certain type of livestock. And you see how inhabitants from a certain region are distinguished from others in both appearance and character...

It is like a certain mountain on which they say a vineyard thrives. Well, if they didn't plant the grapevine or didn't cultivate the ground properly, it would not produce grapes. The first thing is that [the Jewish people] are a treasured nation [they are like the grapes in the analogy]. And secondly the Land contributes to the Jewish people's development – along with their actions and the laws that relate to the Land – resembling the cultivation of the vineyard. Ultimately, no other place can provide the Jewish people with Divine Influence, just as the vineyard cannot successfully grow anywhere but on this mountain.

אל יקשה בעיניך שתתחד ארץ בדבר מכל הארצות, ואתה רואה מקום שמצליח בו צמח מבלתי צמח, ומוצא מבלעדי מוצא, וחיה מבלעדי חיה, ומתיחדים יושביו בצורות ומדות מבלעדי זולתם במצוה המזג...

כן [ההר] זה שאתם אומרים שמצליח בו הכרם אילו לא היו נוטעים בו הגפנים ועובדים העבודה הראויה להם, לא היה עושה ענבים. והמעלה המיוחדת הראשונה היא לעם שהוא סגולה ולב כאשר זכרתי, ויש לארץ עזר בזה עם המעשים והתורות התלויות בה אשר הם כעבודה לכרם, אבל לא יתכן לסגולה הזאת להגיע אל הענין האלהי בבלעדי המקום הזה, כאשר לא יתכן שיצליח הכרם בבלעדי ההר הזה.

The Jewish people can also grow anywhere, but will only flourish on the soil of the Holy Land. There is a natural spiritual harmony between the soul of the Land and the soul of the Jew. See also the Morasha class “The Centrality of the Land of Israel” for a fuller discussion of this topic.

Until the time when the entire Jewish nation returns to the Land of Israel, one should know that God still loves His people.

4. **Maharal, Derech Chaim, Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 5:17 – God's love for the Jewish people is eternal.**

That which the Mishnah writes, “Any love that is not dependent on a specific cause will never disappear” comes to inform us about the faith and trust of the Jewish people in exile. It is impossible that [God's love] will ever disappear, for His love for the Jewish people is not dependent on anything whatsoever, and since His love for us is independent of any factors, His love is eternal.

כי מה שאמר (אבות ה:טז) “כל אהבה שאינה תלויה בדבר אינה בטילה לעולם”, בא להודיע תקות ובטחון ישראל בגלות, שאי אפשר שתהיה האהבה בטילה לעולם, שהרי האהבה שהשי"י אהב ישראל לא היתה תלויה בדבר... אין האהבה בטילה.

PART D. HOLINESS ANYWHERE

Although the Land of Israel possesses an intrinsic spirituality that surpasses any place in the world, holiness is also available outside the Land of Israel. That is because it is the Torah and its power to connect us to God that is the basis of spirituality, and the Torah can be studied and observed no matter where you are.

1. Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (Netziv), Ha'emek Davar, Bereishit 37:1- Any place in the world can be sanctified by performing mitzvot.

[“And Jacob settled] in the land of his father’s sojourning [in the Land of Canaan]” – Even though the time of the blessing of the Land of Israel had not yet arrived [and would not be] until the exile in Egypt, “in a land that was not their own” (Bereishit 15:13) [the full sanctity of Israel was only attained after the Exodus from Egypt when Joshua conquered the land from the Canaanites], nevertheless Yaakov chose to live in the Land of Israel because it was the land of his father’s sojourning and it was already sanctified [to an extent] through [their observance of] Torah and service of God...

And even with respect to burial, it states in the Talmud [Ketuvot 111] that just as it is preferable to be buried in the Land of Israel over other lands, so too is it preferable to be buried in Babylon over other lands, since Babylon was a great Torah center (at that time). How much more so when a person is alive and chooses to settle somewhere – he should choose a place that is rooted in Torah and in the service of God.

”[וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִגְוָרֵי אָבִיו] [בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן]” - ...והרי ברכת הארץ עדיין לא הגיעה השעה עד אחר הגלות בארץ לא להם. אלא מפני שהיה ארץ מגורי אביו ונתקדשה בתורה ועבודה מכבר ...

והרי אפילו לענין קבורה איתא בכתובות ק”א כמו דיפה בארץ ישראל יותר מכל הארצות, כך יפה בבל שהוא מקום תורה יותר מכל הארצות. מכל שכן ישיבה בחיים ודאי טוב להיות במקום מושרש לתורה ועבודה.

When we follow God’s will by keeping the Torah, we bring kedushah into the world. Thus, the Land of Israel became sanctified to some extent through the Torah and mitzvot of the Patriarchs well before the formal sanctification of the Land during its conquest from the Canaanites by Joshua.

2. Bamidbar Rabbah 1:7 – Spirituality is freely accessible no matter where you are.

“And God spoke to Moshe in the Sinai desert...” Why in the Sinai desert? From here the Sages taught that the Torah was given with three things: fire, water, and desert...And why was the Torah given with these three things? Because just as these things are freely accessible to everyone in the world, so too is the Torah freely accessible to anyone in the world, as the verse says, “Let all who thirst drink water” (Yeshaya/Isaiah 55).

וידבר ה' אל משה במדבר סיני, למה במדבר סיני מכאן שנו חכמים בג' דברים ניתנה התורה: באש, ובמים, ובמדבר... ולמה ניתנה בג' דברים הללו אלא מה אלו חנם לכל באי העולם כך דברי תורה חנם הם שנאמר (ישעיה נה) הוי כל צמא לכו למים.

3. **Rabbi Berel Wein, Parshat Bamidbar from www.torah.org – The Torah transcends territorial boundaries.**

The granting of the Torah in the desert of Sinai signaled its universal extra-territorial status. Even though the Land of Israel occupies a special and central role in the Torah and in Jewish life and has many commandments that are capable of being followed and observed only there, and the Land of Israel imparts a special quality to all of the commandments performed there, nevertheless the Jewish people existed for thousands of years in very far-flung places in the world, and were bound together by their Torah commandments, values and traditions.

The Torah was granted to us in a desert, in a place of no particular sovereignty, language, culture or government. The Torah, in its general sense, has no limitations of space or time. It represents the Eternal and therefore takes on all of the characteristics of its Creator, Who is unlimited in space and time.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I

- ⌘ God's personal intervention in daily affairs (*hashgachah pratit*) is more easily recognized in the Land of Israel, as it is directly under His scrutiny. As such, it was also the only place where the level of prophecy could be reached.
- ⌘ The Land of Israel is more spiritual than other lands, since it is set aside for the specific purpose of connecting to God and performing the mitzvot. Many mitzvot can only be kept there, and all mitzvot achieve a higher purpose when performed there.
- ⌘ The Land of Israel is fertile ground for the spiritual growth of the Jewish people.
- ⌘ Nonetheless, any place where mitzvot are performed has a certain level of holiness associated with it.

SECTION II: SPIRITUALITY OF SYNAGOGUES AND HOLY OBJECTS

There is another area in which we encounter spirituality. Specific structures and objects in the physical world, particularly ones that facilitate mitzvot, have the power to help us connect to God.

PART A. **MAN HAS THE ABILITY TO IMPART HOLINESS**

Once God gave the Torah at Mount Sinai, this mountain no longer preserved any uniqueness or intrinsic holiness. Yet a humanly made synagogue or Beit Ha-Midrash (study hall) retains its sanctity even after it is no longer in use. How is this paradox to be understood?

1. **Shemot (Exodus) 19:13 – Originally, Mount Sinai was a holy place.**

No hand shall touch it [Mount Sinai], for he shall surely be stoned or cast down; any animal or person [who touches it] shall not live; when the shofar sounds long, they are permitted to ascend the mountain.

לֹא-תִגַּע בּוֹ יָד, כִּי-סִקּוּל יִסְקַל אוֹ-יָרֶה יִירֶה אִם-בְּהֵמָה
אִם-אִישׁ, לֹא יִחְיֶה; בְּמוֹשָׁךְ הַיָּבֵל הַמָּה יַעֲלוּ בָהָר.

2. **Commentary of Rashi on Shemot 19:13 – Once the Divine Presence left the mountain, it was no longer deemed holy.**

When the shofar sounds a long blast, it is a sign of the departure of the Divine Presence and ending of God's "voice." Once it has departed, they are permitted to ascend.

כשימשוך היוכל קול ארוך הוא סימן סילוק שכינה והפסקת הקול וכיון שנסתלק הם רשאים לעלות:

3. **Talmud Taanit 21b – Just as the holiness of Mount Sinai was not permanent, neither was the holiness of the places where the Tabernacle rested.**

We find that as long as the Divine Presence was resting on Mount Sinai, the Torah says "even the sheep and cattle may not graze next to it." Once the Divine Presence left, the Torah says, "When the shofar sounds they may ascend the mountain." Similarly we find with the Ohel Moed (Tabernacle): as long as it was standing, the Torah says, "Send from the camp all the impure people..." Once the curtains are packed up, impure people are permitted to enter there.

מצינו בהר סיני שכל זמן שהשכינה שרויה עליו אמרה תורה גם הצאן והבקר אל ירעו אל מול ההר ההוא נסתלקה שכינה ממנו אמרה תורה במשך היוכל המה יעלו בהר וכן מצינו באהל מועד שבמדבר שכל זמן שהוא נטוי אמרה תורה וישלחו מן המחנה כל צרוע הוגללו הפרוכת הותרו ובין והמצורעים ליכנס שם.

In contrast with Mount Sinai and the resting places of the Tabernacle, once a synagogue or Beit Midrash (study hall) becomes holy, it retains its holiness even when it is no longer in use.

4. **Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 151:10 – A synagogue and a Beit Midrash retain their sanctity.**

Even after they have been destroyed, they [a synagogue and Beit Midrash] retain their holiness. Just as we treat them with respect when they are standing, so too when they are destroyed.

אפילו לאחר שחרבו עדיין הן בקדושתן וכשם שנוהגים בהם כבוד בישובן כך נוהגים בחורבנם.

Why the difference? Man has the potential to impart eternal holiness through the power of Torah study.

5. **Nefesh HaChaim, Shaar 4, Ch. 30 – The difference between Mount Sinai and a synagogue or Beit Midrash is that the latter's holiness is endowed through the power of people learning Torah.**

If a person would fulfill all of the 613 commandments properly, with all the details and particulars, with pure holy intention... despite this, there is no comparison at all between the holiness and light of the mitzvot to the overwhelming holiness and light of the holy Torah that illuminates someone who seriously engages in Torah study...

This is what is stated in Pirkei Avot 6:1, "Torah makes him great and exalted above all creations," meaning his Torah is considered superior to

... אם קיים האדם כל התרי"ג מצוות כולן בשלימות האמיתי כראוי בכל פרטיהם ודקדוקיהם ובכוונה וטהרה וקדושה... עם כל זה אין ערוך ודמיון כלל קדושת ואור המצוות לגודל עוצם קדושת ואור התורה הקדושה אשר תופיע נהרה על האדם העוסק והוגה בה כראוי...

וזהו שאמרו ב' התורה (אבות ו:א) "ומגדלתו ומרוממתו על כל המעשים" היינו על כל מעשי המצוות כולן. וכן אמרו בירושלמי פרק א' דפאה שכל המצוות

all the mitzvot combined. Similarly it is stated in the Talmud Yerushalmi, Peah 1, “All the mitzvot combined are not comparable to one aspect of the Torah [that one studies]” (for Torah is the foundation for all the mitzvot and enables reaching unlimited levels – Toldot Yitzchak).

Also, because the mitzvah only illuminates and sanctifies the object being used for the mitzvah during the performance of the mitzvah. But after the mitzvah is completed, the holiness and light depart immediately, and the object returns to its initial state.

In contrast, any place that the holy Torah shines its holy light on even one time – that place forever remains holy. This is taught in the Braita [Megillah 26b], “Objects that were used for mitzvot can be carefully disposed of after they were used for a mitzvah; holy objects (that involved Torah study like a Sefer Torah [Torah scroll], tefillin and mezuzah which are no longer usable) must be buried (reflecting its holiness).

כולן אינן שוות לדבר אחד מן התורה:

וגם כי קדושת ואור המצוה אשר תשכין אורה על אותו הדבר והחפץ, אשר בו ועל ידו תעשה המצוה, אינו שורה עליהם רק לפי שעתו בעת שהמצוה נעשית בהם. אבל אחר שנעשה בהן מצותן הקדושה והאור מתעלה ומסתלק מהם תיכף ונשאר כבראשונה.

אבל התורה הקדושה כל מקום שתזריח ותופיע אורה וקדושתה פעם אחת, קדושת עולם תהיה לו ונשאר תמיד בקדושתו. כמו ששינינו בברייתא (מגילה כ"ו ב') שתשמישי מצוה נזרקין לאחר שנעשה מצותן ותשמישי קדושה נגזזין.

Consequently, objects that are used for a mitzvah, such as a sukkah, lulav, shofar, and tzitzit become holy by virtue of their use for the mitzvah, and maintain their holiness only as long as they are used for the mitzvah. However, a synagogue, Beit Midrash, Torah Scroll, tefillin or mezuzah retain permanent holiness, since their kedusha was imbued through their connection to the Torah itself.

Nevertheless, one should not think that performing the mitzvot should be trivialized in relation to Torah study. Just the opposite, fulfilling the mitzvot is the goal of Torah study!

How do these profound ideas make a difference on an individual level?

6. **Rabbi Reuven Leuchter, Meshivat Nefesh, p. 141 – It is necessary for every individual to study Torah and perform mitzvot!**

The Torah and mitzvot are compared to the relationship of the body and the soul. Just like the body has no life without the soul shining inside, similarly, the mitzvot also do not have intrinsic holiness. All of the holiness of the mitzvot flows and expands from the fact that they are written in the Torah. On the other hand, Torah also has no possibility of being revealed to the world without the body, for the Torah is rooted in a Higher World and is revealed in the world of action through the mitzvot...

The Nefesh HaChayim teaches us that the holiness that flows from the Torah to the mitzvot depends specifically on the personal involvement

התורה והמצוות משולים לגוף ונשמה. כשם שלגוף אין חיות ללא הנשמה המאירה בתוכו, כך גם למצוות אין קדושה מעצמן, וכל קדושתן נובעת ונמשכת מכך שהן כתובות בתורה. אולם מאידך, גם לתורה אין אפשרות להתגלות בעולם ללא גוף, משום שהיא שייכת לעולם עליון, והיא מתגלה בחיי המעשה רק בתוך המצוות...

בתוך הדברים מחדש רבינו שהקדושה הנמשכת מהתורה אל המצוות תלויה דווקא בעסק התורה של

of every single person in Torah study. It is not sufficient that the mitzvot are written in the Torah or that there are righteous people in the world engaged in Torah study.

כל יחיד ויחיד, ואין די בכך שהמצוות כתובות בתורה,
או שישנם בעולם צדיקים העוסקים בתורה...

See also the Morasha series on Personal Growth and Development, and Bein Adam L'Chavero.

PART B. TORAH SCROLL, TEFILLIN, MEZUZAH

As we mentioned above, Jewish law distinguishes between items that are used for holiness and items which are used for mitzvot. Sometimes we will use an object for a mitzvah, but once the mitzvah is performed we have no more use for the object. In such a case, the sanctity leaves the item. Other items are specifically designated for a holy purpose and therefore retain their sanctity even when their usage has lapsed.

1. Talmud Megillah 26b – There is a difference between items used temporarily for a mitzvah and items designated for a holy purpose.

It was taught: Items used for a mitzvah may be thrown out. Items used for holiness must be buried. The following are items used for a mitzvah: sukkah, lulav, shofar, tzitzit. The following are items used for holiness: bags for Torah scrolls, tefillin, mezuzot, a Torah scroll cover, a tefillin bag, and their straps.

תנו רבנן: תשמישי מצוה - נזרקין, תשמישי קדושה - נגנזין. ואלו הן תשמישי מצוה: סוכה, לולב, שופר, ציצית. ואלו הן תשמישי קדושה: דלוסקמי ספרים, תפילין ומזוזות, ותיק של ספר תורה, וגרתיק של תפילין ורצועותיהן.

[It should be noted that even while mitzvah objects lose their sanctity when they are no longer being used for the mitzvah, nevertheless these objects should still be treated with respect for the function they once served. See Rema, Orach Chaim 21:1]

The reason that certain objects retain their sanctity even when they are no longer in use is because of their connection to Torah such as a Torah scroll, tefillin and mezuzah. The scribe must express he is clearly aware of the holiness of the Torah scroll when he begins writing.

2. Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 274:1 – A Torah scroll is written for the purpose of having sanctity.

When he begins to write, the scribe must say "This Torah scroll that I am writing is for the sake of the holiness of a Torah scroll."

צריך שיאמר הסופר כשיתחיל לכתוב: ספר זה אני כותב לשם קדושת ספר תורה.

Between different objects there are varying degrees of sanctity. Parchment which has been prepared for a Torah scroll may not be used to write a mezuzah, because the holiness of a Torah is greater.

3. Rambam (Maimonides), Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Mezuzah 5:1 – The parchment of a Torah scroll cannot be downgraded for other purposes.

One may not write a mezuzah on the parchment for a Torah scroll, because we do not downgrade something from a higher holiness to a lower holiness.

ולא מן הגליונים של ספר תורה אין כותבין עליו מזוזה לפי שאין מורידין מקדושה חמורה לקדושה קלה:

The holiness of the parchment alone is not as great as the holiness of the Torah after it has been written. The reason for this is that these words have the highest degree of holiness, because they are the “soul” written by a scribe on the “body” of the parchment.

Rabbi Reuven Leuchter explains, based on the Rambam cited below, that the holiness of tefillin inspires a person to think in a way which is holy and connects him to God and His commandments, because we wear it on our head (as well as the arm), and they are viewed as part of our brain.

4. **Rambam (Maimonides), Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Tefillin u-Mezuzah 4:25 – The holiness of tefillin inspires an awareness of God.**

The holiness of tefillin is very great, for as long as tefillin are on a man's head and arm, he will be humble and God-fearing and will not be drawn after laughter and idle chatter. He will not think bad thoughts, but will tune into words of truth and righteousness

קדושת תפילין, קדושה גדולה היא: שכל זמן שתפילין על ראשו של אדם, ועל זרועו – הוא עניו וירא, ואינו נמשך בשחוק ובשיחה בטילה, ואינו מהרהר במחשבות רעות, אלא מפנה ליבו לדברי האמת והצדק.

The mezuzah also impacts our thoughts and connects us to God and Jewish ideals.

5. **Rabbeinu Bachya, Devarim 6:9 – Core principles of Jewish faith are written in the mezuzah.**

You must know that many fundamentals of faith are explained to us through the mitzvah of mezuzah: the creation of the world, Divine Providence and prophecy. The concepts of the unity of God and learning Torah are mentioned in the first paragraph. The truth of reward and punishment, the remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt, when many well-known signs, wonders and miracles were performed, are all mentioned in the second paragraph. These fundamental principles obligate and testify about the three following fundamental principles of faith: creation, providence and prophecy... For this reason it is called “mezuzah,” which has the same numerical value as God's name Ad-nai (65). Moreover, just as God is called the “Guardian of Israel,” the mezuzah protects a person from outside (the home) while he is inside

According to the simple explanation, the reason that we write the name “Shadai” on the mezuzah is because the nations of the world think that the success of a house's [protection] is dependent upon the influence of the stars. This name conquers and overcomes any astrological portents. Therefore, it is written to remind us that all goodness flows into our homes from God, not from the stars.

וצריך אתה לדעת כי מתוך המצוה הזאת יתבארו לנו עיקרי התורה באמונה: חדוש העולם, וההשגחה, והנבואה, שהרי בפרשה ראשונה נזכר ענין היחוד ותלמוד תורה, ובפרשה שניה אמיתת עונש ושכר, וזכרון יציאת מצרים שבו נעשים האותות והמופתים והנסים המפורסמים מחייב העיקרים האלה ומעיד על שלשה דברים הללו שהן יסוד האמונה ושרשה, והם: החדוש, וההשגחה, והנבואה... ומטעם זה נקראת בשם “מזוזה” שהוא במספר שם אל”ף דל”ת, והוא גם כן נקרא שומר ישראל, וכן המזוזה תשמור האדם מבחוץ והוא מבפנים.

ולפי פשוטו טעם היותנו כותבין שם של שד-י במזוזה לפי שהאומות חושבים שהצלחת הבתים תלויה במערכת הכוכבים, ומפני שהשם הזה משדד ומנצח המערכת, על כן נכתוב אותו לרמוז כי ממנו השפע והטוב נכנס אל הבתים לא מן המערכת.

6. Rambam, Hilchot Mezuzah (Laws of Mezuzah) 6:13 – The mezuzah arouses us to live a meaningful Jewish life.

A person is obligated to be careful with the mitzvah of mezuzah since it is continually incumbent upon each person. Each time that one enters and leaves [his home], he should concentrate on the Oneness of the Name of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and remember His love, and be aroused from his sleep and his mistaken [involvement] in the meaningless use of time. And one must know that the only thing which lasts forever is the knowledge of God.

חייב אדם להזהר במזוזה מפני שהיא חובת הכל תמיד.
וכל זמן שיכנס ויצא יפגע ביחוד השם שמו של הקדוש
ב"ה ויזכור אהבתו ויעור משנתו ושגיותיו בהבלי הזמן.
וידע שאין דבר העומד לעולם ולעולמי עולמים אלא
ידיעת צור העולם.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II.

- ∞ Certain structures and objects in the physical world have the capacity to be sanctified. A synagogue or Beit Midrash maintains its holiness – even if it is no longer in use, or even if it has been destroyed – since people learned Torah in these buildings.
- ∞ Objects that are used for a mitzvah, such as a sukkah, lulav, shofar, and tzitzit, become holy by virtue of their use for the mitzvah, and maintain their holiness only as long as they are used for the mitzvah.
- ∞ A Torah scroll, tefillin or mezuzah always retain holiness since their kedushah was imbued through their connection to the Torah.

SECTION III. THE CAPACITY FOR ETERNAL SPIRITUALITY – THE WORLD TO COME

Finally, we will consider the seemingly temporal nature of our own spirituality. Some people think about their ultimate future. What happens after a person dies? Is there life after death? Central to Jewish thought is the principle that every mitzvah we perform has transcendent value and that through our actions we build our own future eternal world known as the World to Come.

1. Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 4:16 – This world is a chance to prepare for the next.

Rabbi Yaakov would say, "This world is comparable to the antechamber before the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the antechamber, so that you may enter the banquet hall."

רבי יעקב אומר העולם הזה דומה לפרוזדור בפני
העולם הבא התקן עצמך בפרוזדור כדי שתכנס
למרבית:

Judaism teaches that there are two distinct periods of existence: one is this world where we strive for perfection, and the second is the World to Come, where we will earn our eternal reward.

2. **Ramchal (Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto), Derech Hashem (The Way of God) 1:3:4, translated by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Feldheim Publishers, pp. 47-49 – The World to Come will function according to laws of nature conducive to receiving reward.**

Since the period of earning and that of reward are different, it is appropriate that man's environment and experiences be different in the two. While he is striving toward perfection, he must be in a setting containing elements necessary for such effort. The period of earning must therefore be one [where a maximum challenge exists and] where the spiritual and physical are in constant strife. In this environment there must be nothing to prevent the material from prevailing and doing what it can, and conversely, there must be nothing to prevent the spiritual from doing likewise. Nothing should exist that would give either one an inappropriate advantage. Although it might seem best to make the spiritual stronger than the physical, in the light of man's true purpose and what God desires of him, namely, that he earn perfection through his own effort, it would not be good at all.

In the period of reward, however, the exact opposite is appropriate. The more the physical would prevail, the more it would darken the soul and prevent it from being drawn close to God. During the time of reward, it is therefore appropriate that the soul prevail and that the physical be totally subjugated to it and not restrain it at all. And that is why God created two worlds, this world and the next: this world is the place that runs according to the laws of nature conducive to man's effort, while the World to Come functions according to laws of nature that are fitting for receiving reward.

ואולם כפי התחלף זמניו, כך ראוי שיתחלף מצבו ושאר מקריו. כי כל זמן ההשתדלות הנה צריך שיהיה בתכונה אחת, שיוכלו לימצא בו כל הענינים המצטרפים לו לפי ענין ההשתדלות הזה. פירוש - כי הנה מוכרח שתמצא לו המלחמה שזכרנו בין השכל והחומר, ולא יהיה לו דבר שיעכב את החומר מלשלוט ולעשות את שלו כפי השיעור הראוי לו, ולא דבר שיעכב את השכל מלשלוט ולעשות את שלו כפי השיעור הראוי לו. וכן לא יהיה דבר שיגרום לחומר להתחזק יותר מן הראוי, וגם לא יגרום לשכל להתחזק יותר מן הראוי. כי אע"פ שמצד אחד היה נראה זה יותר טוב, הנה לפי הכונה האמיתית והענין הנרצה באדם, שהוא קניית השלימות בהשתדלותו, איננו טוב.

ובזמן קיבול השכר הנה ראוי לו שיהיה במצב הפכי לזה, כי הנה כל מה שיהיה החומר שולט באותו זמן, הנה לא היה אלא מחשיך ומעכב על הנשמה שלא תתדבק בבורא ית', ועל כן הנה ראוי הוא שלא ישלוט או אלא הנשמה, והחומר יהיה נמשך אחריה לגמרי באופן שלא יעכב על ידה כלל. ואמנם על כן נבראו שני העולמות, עוה"ז ועוה"ב. עוה"ז המקום והחוקים הטבעיים שלו הם מה שראוי לאדם כל זמן ההשתדלות, והעוה"ב המקום והחוקים שלו הם מה שראוי לו בזמן קיבול השכר:

But the World to Come also teaches us an important lesson for this world. If our eternal future world is created by our actions, then what infuses every moment in life with the most profound meaning in *this* world is looking for opportunities for spiritual growth through Torah, mitzvot, character perfection and *tikun olam* (bringing the world to its purpose). This brings us full circle. Jewish spirituality is all-encompassing, because God grants us the incredible opportunity to build a purposeful and meaningful life for now and eternity!

3. **Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Siftei Chaim, Pirkei Emunah U'Bchirah, Vol. II, pp. 230-1 – The World to Come teaches us the meaning of our lives in this world.**

The subject of the World to Come and belief in it are not just fundamental principles of faith that teach us the greatness and kindness of God. As Rabbi Sa'adiah Gaon said, "There is nothing more spectacular about the Resurrection than there

נמצא שענין תחיית המתים והאמונה בו, אין הוא רק מיסודות האמונה כדי ללמדנו את גדולת הבורא והכרת חסדיו יתב', כפי שהרס"ג כותב על תחיית המתים: "אין בזה פלא יותר מעיקר בריאתו" (ועיין סנהדרין

is about Creation itself.” (This sentiment is based on the Talmud, Sanhedrin 91a: If what once did not exist came into existence, then all the more so will that which already exists can come into existence again.) That is, the actual existence of man testifies no less to God’s greatness and kindness than does the Resurrection of the Dead.

Rather, since the reward of the World to Come is a function of man’s effort and toil, we can learn that the purpose of man in this world and the way in which he prepares himself [for the World to Come] is through the fulfillment of the Torah and the mitzvot...

צא. דלא הוּו – חיי, דהוי חיי – לא כל שכן, כי עצם
בריאית האדם הוא פלא והכרת גדולת הבורא וחסדיו
לא פחות מתחיית המתים.

אלא מתוך שהשכר בעוה"ב לפי מידת עמלו
והשתדלותו של האדם, נמצינו למדים שתפקיד האדם
בעוה"ז והכשרתו הוא ע"י קיום תורה ומצוות.

See further the Morasha series on the Messianic Era and the World to Come.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III.

- ⌘ Judaism teaches that there are two distinct periods of existence: one is this world where we strive for perfection, and the second is the World to Come where we will earn our eternal reward.
- ⌘ If our eternal future world is created by our actions, then what infuses every moment in life with the most profound meaning in *this* world is looking for opportunities for spiritual growth through Torah, mitzvot, perfecting our character and *tikun olam*.

EPILOGUE. A TAILOR-MADE JOURNEY TO SPIRITUALITY

We now conclude our introduction to Jewish spirituality. We have seen that the endless opportunity for Jewish spirituality is staggering – whether connecting to God, striving to perfect one’s character, or improving our interpersonal relationships, all in the framework of Divine mitzvot. Time is the dynamic medium in which we actualize our spirituality. As we travel through the Jewish calendar, we are nourished by the spiritual energies from each Shabbat and festival, and work on integrating their profound lessons. During weekdays we seek to actualize the spiritual potential of each moment as we labor to build and improve the world. Likewise, the dimension of space offers spirituality opportunities: the Land of Israel possesses a special holiness which can elevate our life, yet we are also taught that Torah study and mitzvah observance anywhere in the world can raise us to the greatest heights. Similarly, certain structures and objects have spiritual attributes: the synagogue is the focal point of Jewish communal life. It is the home of God, a place of prayer and study where we can connect to Him. A Sefer Torah, tefillin and the mezuzah are holy physical objects deriving intrinsic meaning from the Torah that commands their use.

But there is more. God desires the perfection of each person and as such runs the world with the principle of hashgachah pratit, Divine Providence. A person needs to both 1) proactively seek to express his spirituality through Torah and mitzvot, living each day fully according to Jewish ethics, and 2) strive to properly *respond* to the Heavenly-sent challenges that enable him to fulfill his potential.

1. **Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, *Life is Now*, ArtScroll Publishers, p. 17 – The essence of life is to face Divinely placed challenges.**

In 1964, I read a poem that moved me greatly. It was written by the late Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler in Hebrew, and was published in the third volume (p. 306) of his classic work *Michtav MeEliyahu*. Here is an English translation:

*The past is only memories.
The future is but illusory hopes.
Focus on the present.
For that is where your life really is.
And it consists only of challenges.*

I memorized the poem and have repeated it frequently over the years. It is profound. This short poem sums up one of the most important lessons we all need to live our lives to the fullest...

Reality is in the here and now. We live each moment of each day “now, in the present.” Now we think any of the thoughts we choose to think. Now we choose to say or not to say something. Now we decide what we will do or not do at any given moment.

What is the essence of each moment of life? It is Divinely orchestrated tests and challenges. Rabbi Dessler’s poem is based on the first chapter of the classic mussar book, *Mesilat Yesharim* (Path of the Just). There we read that everything is a test to help us elevate ourselves. Wealth is a test. Poverty is a test. When all is going well and we experience tranquility, that is a test. And when we are faced with difficult life challenges, they are a test as well.

When you are well prepared for a test and know that you are skilled, that you are able to do great work, you actually enjoy the tests that you take. They don’t make you anxious or nervous. You feel an inner pleasure in knowing that you are passing the test.

Sometimes you know that a test is going to be difficult. But if the potential benefits of doing well on the test are magnificent, you mentally and physically prepare in every way you can to excel on the test. You devote all your time and energy to build up your skills and talents. You celebrate each bit of progress and improvement.

Preparing to master the challenges we face gives our life purpose and meaning. Actually doing well is a source of great joy. Those who realize that life is for growing and developing from each and every challenge, each day of our lives, live a life of joy.

(See further the Morasha classes on Hashgachah Pratit.)

Ultimately, our ability to actualize our spirituality depends upon investing thoughtful, ongoing effort to take focused steps in building a relationship with God, to refine our character, and clarify and fulfill our mission in life.

Once, I was amazed to watch a school of salmon in a fishery on the Pacific coast. The fish would swim against the tide on their way upstream. When they encountered an obstacle such as a cascade, they would leap to reach a higher level and continue on to an even more uphill course. All programs for spiritual advancement advocate a gradual progression. Jacob dreamt of a ladder rooted in the earth and reaching Heaven, a ladder with rungs to be ascended one at a time...

Most spiritual people were not born that way, but achieved their spirituality through slow and steady attention to their

soul's work. There is no high-speed journey to spirituality. It starts with setting a goal and using stepping stones to getting there. My advice is that those stones be good deeds [and Torah study].

If you are in search of spirituality, you have it. If you believe you already have it, you have lost it.
(Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, MD, Do Unto Others, Andrew McMeel Publishing, p. 162.)

CLASS SUMMARY:

IF GOD IS EVERYWHERE, WHY IS ISRAEL MORE HOLY THAN OTHER LANDS?

The Land of Israel has more kedushah than other lands since it is set aside for a specific purpose, namely serving God and performing mitzvot. It is also the place from where the earth was gathered to make Adam. Additionally, God's personal intervention in daily affairs (*hashgachah pratit*) is more easily recognized in the Land of Israel.

IS IT POSSIBLE FOR OTHER LANDS TO ACHIEVE HOLINESS?

Yes, any place where mitzvot are performed have a certain level of kedushah associated with it, and it is preferable to live there than in a place devoid of such kedushah.

HOW DO PHYSICAL OBJECTS ACQUIRE SANCTITY?

A synagogue or Beit Midrash are made holy and maintain that holiness by virtue of people having learned Torah there, even if the building is no longer in use, or has been destroyed.

A Torah scroll, tefillin and mezuzah always retain holiness because their kedushah was imbued by the words of Torah that are written upon them.

Objects that are used for a mitzvah (but without an inherent connection to the words of Torah itself), such as a sukkah, lulav, shofar and tzitzit, thereby become holy and maintain their holiness only as long as they are used for the mitzvah.

HOW CAN SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN ONE'S LIFETIME CREATE AN ETERNAL SPIRITUAL EXISTENCE IN THE WORLD TO COME?

Central to Jewish thought is the principle that every mitzvah we perform has transcendent value and through our actions we build our own future eternal world known as the World to Come.

Since the period of earning and that of reward are different, it is appropriate that man's environment and experiences be different in the two. While he is striving toward perfection, the maximum challenge exists, and the spiritual and physical are in constant strife. In the World to Come, the soul will prevail and will not be restrained at all by the physical.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDED READING & SOURCES

Rabbi Yehudah haLevi, *The Kuzari*, Second Essay

Rabbi Akiva Tatz, *Living Inspired*, Targum Press

Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, *Generation to Generation*, Traditional Press

Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman, *Kovetz Ma'amarim*, p. 63