

With wishes for a *Good Shabbos*, we at **Operation Home Again** are excited to share this week's newsletter.

- **From The HOME Desk:** Enjoy a brief update from behind the scenes at OHA.
- **Calling Us HOME:** In a shiur given last week covering Halacha, Hashkafa, and current events, Rav Yitzchok Breitowitz calls on Jews in Chutz L'Aretz to "think very seriously" about moving to Eretz Yisrael.
- **HaAretz Asher Areka:** In this next part of the series of excerpts from Rav Shnayor Burton's sefer, read about the connection between appreciating Eretz Yisrael and Geulah.
- **The Parsha Brings Us HOME - Tetzaveh:** Specific pasukim teach that the glory of Hashem rests upon the clothing of the Kohen HaGadol as well as upon Am Yisrael when they gather in Eretz Yisrael.

Please share with family and friends and help us inspire a return **HOME**.

שבת שלום ופורים שמח



Sunset over Gan HaShloshah, the naturally warm springs in the valley of Beit Shean

From The **HOME** Desk

This Week's Look Behind the Curtain:

In the Media

In recent years, the understanding that Eretz Yisrael is our HOME and where we belong has slowly been taking root in the collective consciousness of Am Yisrael. We enjoyed three articles that were published this week that encourage us to further deepen our appreciation of the gift that Hashem has given us.

This week, Israel National News published an article by Avraham Shusteris, **What's Missing in Lakewood?**, which notes that even though the city has "kosher supermarkets with 150 different flavored dips for Shabbos," there is something missing in Jewish life in New Jersey.

Shmuel Sackett, founder of Am Yisrael Chai Fund, suggests in the article, **We'll Wait Until We Retire**, why a plan to retire in Eretz Yisrael may be unrealistic, but offers an alternative solution that could help a family still in Chutz L'Aretz build a real connection to Eretz Yisrael.

HaModia continues with its regular series highlighting communities in Eretz Yisrael. This week's article features the port city of Ashkelon and its growing Torah community that is asserting a tremendous positive effect on the whole city. Read the article by clicking on the picture below.

ISRAEL ROUNDUP

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ISRAEL ROUNDUP

ASHKELON

Ashkelon, a city on the Mediterranean coast about 30 miles (48 km) south of Tel Aviv and 8 miles (13 km) north of the Gaza Strip, is not numbered among the Israeli cities with a sizable *chareidi* population. For many among the *chareidi* *tribbur*, this effectively puts it "off the map," but wrongly so. Ashkelon is a city of mostly traditional Jews, a city with some 250 shuls, almost all of which have regular Torah study thanks to the influx of religious and *chareidi* families, and to date, about 400 *avrachim*.

"Every *avrach* that comes here makes a difference," Rav Yitzchak Ben Tikva of Ashkelon's Religious Council told *Hamasia*. "In Yerushalayim one more *avrach* doesn't make an impression that we can see, but here, each one is a *man d'umar*."

Adding to the ability of an observant Jew to have a positive effect on his neighborhood, Rav Ben Tikva notes an aspect of Ashkelon which he says has its advantages and disadvantages.

"There is no specific *chareidi* *kiriyah* in Ashkelon. While there are two neighborhoods with a larger concentration of *from Jews* — Shikunim and Atikot — the reality is that *chareidim* are spread throughout the city. And the atmosphere one feels in a *chareidi* neighborhood in Yerushalayim or Bnei Brak doesn't really exist here, even in these two main centers.

"It's not unusual to have one Torah-observant Jew in a building with traditional or secular families. This situation has given rise to *avrachim* launching myriad *kiruv* projects, mostly focused around activities in local shuls. I would say that this is a veritable revolution that has been going on in Ashkelon for the past 10 years. The fact that we are spread out means that every religious family makes a difference, and since we are among traditional Jews, we are appreciated."

Rav Ben Tikva estimates that today, there are 1,000 children learning in *chadarim* and girls' schools of the *chareidi* *tribbur* here. There are two girls' seminaries and two *yeshivos ketanos*, and next year, a third *yeshiva* *ketanah* is slated to open. There are 400 *avrachim*, learning in 40 kollelim, and close to 1,500 *chareidi* families.

Rav Ben Tikva sees as a direct result of this the high caliber of the Ashkelon *chareidi* community's youth.



Hamasia
The port of Ashkelon



Rav Lior Glazer
delivers a shul in
Ashkelon

"Among the *yeshivos gedolos* of the Sephardi *tribbur*, it's well-known that while the *bachurim* from Ashkelon are few in number, we are represented disproportionately among the top-notch *yeshivos*, and I think this is a result of the situation I just described. Ashkelon is not a hermetically sealed community. We live among secular Jews, and while they for the most part appreciate us and relations are cordial, the children here grow up with a clear sense of what our direction is in life, and what it is not."

Rav Avraham Bitton, chairman of the Bnei Yeshivos Association of Ashkelon, notes that youth activities are an important part of life in Ashkelon, and that "in eighth grade we have meetings at night to prepare the *talmidim* for *yeshiva* — for interviews to get into a *yeshiva*, and how to face the adjustments. We have a group of *avrachim* that meet with three *talmidim* each, so each gets personal attention. Of course, this is aside from the *yeshivos* *bein hazmanim* that we have here, with trips and incentives, similar to the

programs in all the *chareidi* centers." Adds Rav Ben Tikva: "The *tribbur* should realize that this is not a 'secular city.' Ashkelon is a predominantly traditional Jewish city. It's true that there was a giant wave of immigration of Jews in the early 1990s that was channeled *davka* to places like Ashkelon, to try to change the overall traditional character of the city; but for the most part it did not work. While there is a secular element in the city, in numbers it's between 10% and 15%."

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HAMASIA



Calling Us HOME

Rav Yitzchok Breitowitz, the Rav of Kehillas Ohr Sameach, gave a shiur last week on yishuv Eretz Yisrael. In less than an hour, Rav Breitowitz delves into Halacha, Hashkafa, history, and current events, calling on Jews in Chutz L'Aretz to "think very seriously" about moving to Eretz Yisrael. The shiur can be seen here: [Rav Yitzchok Breitowitz - Yishuv Eretz Yisrael](#). Transcribed below are excerpts from the shiur.

The point is this: The GRA is machriya like the Ramban (that the mitzvah yishuv Eretz Yisrael is d'Oraita and obligatory), many Gedolim, whether its Rav Shlomo Zalman, Rav Elyashiv, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, all of them, zichronem L'Vracha, have all been machlit that yishuv Eretz Yisrael is a chiyuv d'Oraita. So it's very, very important that a person at least ask the shailah. Far too often it hasn't even been on the radar. People just assume there is no particular obligation. "I'll visit; it'll be nice. I'll spend Pesach here, but then I'll go home to New York or Baltimore or Lakewood or Los Angeles." I'm not here to say people have a chiyuv gamur to move here, but I am here to say that, according to the Ramban, you at least have to ask the question. It has to be on the radar. You ask the question; there needs to be a shailas Chacham. . .

The truth of the matter is, whether it is a chiyuv or not a chiyuv may almost be of secondary importance because even the Rambam [who according to some mefarshim hold that it is not a mitzvah chiyuvis] writes of the zechus of living in Eretz Yisrael, the kedusha, the hiskarvus (closeness) to Hashem, the gift that Hashem gave us, the fact that when the Chachamim came from Bavel they would bow down and kiss the rocks and kiss the dirt. And the Rambam even says, even though I don't think there is any Rav that is going to pasken this way, it is better to live in Eretz Yisrael in a city that is mostly idol worshippers than live in a city in Chutz L'Aretz that is mostly Jews. What does that even mean?! I don't know. If someone was to ask the shailah of a posek, "Should I live in Lakewood or should I move to Ramallah?" . . . Well, most of us would say you are nuts, what kind of nutty question is that? Of course Lakewood is better than Ramallah. Huh! Is that so pashut?! It says in Rambam it is better to live in Eretz Yisrael in a city that is mostly idol worshippers! So, I'm not here to be machriyah. Whatever way we get out of it, I'm sure no one will tell you to move to Ramallah. But I think the important thing to recognize, whether it is a mitzvah or not a mitzvah, either way, it should be something that is so chashuv to us, so important to us. Again, as I said before, this is not a one-size fits all. One of course has to look at parnassah issues, and one has to look at chinuch and one has to look at the needs of their children and the needs of their parents. I am not suggesting that a person simply jumps without sechel, without machshavah, but you have to think about this.

You know, going back to the Kuzari: The Kuzari, Rav Yehudah HaLevi, was even before the Rambam. . . [In the Kuzari] the Kazer, the Melech, says to the Chaver, "I don't understand you Jews. You pray three times a day to go back to Eretz Yisrael. You pray and you pray and you pray and then when you have an opportunity to go, you don't go!" Then the Chaver answers, which is Rav Yehudah HaLevi's answer, "This is our shame, this is our bizayon, this is our disgrace. Hashem listens to the words that we say and it is like the twittering of birds and He looks at us and He says they don't mean what they say." Now, let me point out that going back to Eretz Yisrael in those days was much different than today. Then it was dangerous. It was dangerous to travel there, it was dangerous to live there. . . There was no Ben & Jerry's and there was no Nefesh B'Nefesh and there were no conveniences. And there still was a claim! Why don't the Jews go?! And today, Baruch Hashem. Nefesh B'Nefesh, Ben & Jerry's. Even 50 years ago you had to wait years to get a telephone. Baruch Hashem, [today] you can get a telephone within a day or so. Hashem made it easier. And we daven about Eretz Yisrael and we don't do





HaAretz Asher Areka

In this next part of the series of excerpts from Rav Shnayor Burton's sefer, read about the connection between appreciating Eretz Yisrael and Geulah according to Rav Yehudah HaLevi and the sefer Chareidim.

R' Yehuda HaLevi asserts that the root sin that hinders the return of the Shechinah to its nation is the sin of the Jewish people in neglecting to seek out the land.

The return of Divine Providence to the Children of Israel depends solely on the Children of Israel themselves: If they would only prepare themselves with a powerful pursuit of Zion, to make it the house of their life, then indeed the Shechinah would return to dwell in their midst, just as it would have returned had they all consented willingly to leave the Babylonian exile in the days of the Second Temple.

"You shall arise and have mercy upon Zion, for it is time to favor her, the set time has come. For Your servants take pleasure in her stones and embrace her dust thereof" (Psalms 102:14-15). This means that Jerusalem will only be rebuilt when Israel yearns for it to such an extent that they embrace her stones and dust.

Our exile is not due to some extraneous sin, nor is our redemption dependent on repentance from it – but rather everything depends on our stance toward Zion and Jerusalem itself. The rejection of the cherished land is the root of the distance between us and Hashem, and the desire for it serves as the root of the closeness for which we yearn.

What is the source for this novel idea? It can be derived from the story of the spies. For the exile – from the land, when the Temple was destroyed – was already decreed from then, as is written: "They rejected the cherished land and didn't believe His word... He raised His hand to fell them in the desert and to fell their seed in the nations and to scatter them among the lands" (Psalms 104:24-26); Chazal also asserted that the exile was decreed then, as a punishment for the sin of the spies: "And the people cried that night" (Numbers 14:1); said Hashem: 'You cried for no reason, and I will establish a cry for all generations'" (Taanis 29a). Yet the destruction decreed from days of old is also attributed to the 3 cardinal sins, as Chazal said: "Why was the first Temple destroyed? Because of the 3 things that were in it: idolatry, incest and murder" (Yoma 9b). How do the two sources comport? Which sin caused destruction and exile – the sin of the spies or the 3 cardinal sins? The answer is that they are one and the same: rejecting the holy land leads to all sins; it is the root that grows into poison which leads to forgetting Hashem and forgetting His commandments, and upon it all religion depends.

For in truth, "Whoever resides in Eretz Yisrael remains free from sin" (Kesubos 111a); even so, the Children of Israel sinned throughout the hundreds of years that they resided in EY. How could that be? How did EY not protect them, as promised? It must be that their residence in EY was imperfect since they didn't properly appreciate the benefits of Eretz Yisrael and its holiness, and this from the time of the sin of the spies.

As the prophet said: Son of man, the House of Israel resides on their soil and have contaminated it through their ways... And I have poured my wrath on them for the blood they spilled on the land and have contaminated it with their fetishes. I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries: I punished them in accordance with their ways and their deeds. But when they came to those nations, they caused My holy name to be profaned, in that it was said of them, "These are the people of the LORD, yet they had to leave His land." (Ezekiel 36:17-20)



The Priestly Garments (Picture credit of the Temple Institute)