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ISRAEL: OUR PAST, OUR FUTURE

This session introduces the Israel as our homeland session. In order to really understand our connection to the land of Israel we have to look back into our history and see when our connection truly began. We will go from there through sources which will help us appreciate what Israel was, is and will be.



SOURCE ONE – THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD

We want to show that our connection to the land of Israel is basically since the beginning of time. God always envisioned His people in the land of Israel. The Torah itself is written with that goal in mind. The Torah mentions many times the importance of the land of Israel and the connection that we share with it.¹

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR ISRAEL TO EXIST?

Whether you view Israel as our home or as our very soul, it is of major importance to us. It is part of who are people are; it is our land. It is the land that God gave to us to use to do His will.

It is our true home. Without it we are in part, homeless. And without a home, our lives are not complete. This may a way to understand the law that when a Jew build a house he is supposed to leave over a section unfinished to remember that we are not totally settled no matter where

¹ The Kuzari has an elaborate discussion of many of the Chazal's mentioned about Israel from 2:20:15-2:24:4 (feldheim version). It is in here that the Rabbi acknowledges some of the hypocrisy that was going on with people praising Israel and not being there (even in those times). It is also the topic on which the book ends and the discussion is about inner desires versus action 5:26- end.

we live. The fact that we have a state of Israel now is bringing us one step closer to being in Israel again with the final temple and to see Israel in all its glory. It is a foundation on which we will usher in the Mashiach, and it is therefore very important to us. It is essentially where we belong.

The Tosefta² teaches us that living in Israel is equal to all the Mitzvot. This statement is made a few times by Chazal to indicate mitzvot of extreme importance. Many suggestions have been given for why (feel free to ask this as a discussion question).

One suggested by Rabbi Shlomo Aviner³

Question: If there is a mitzvah of conquering and dwelling in Eretz Yisrael throughout all generations, why doesn't the Rambam count it in his enumeration of the mitzvot?



Answer: Maran Ha-Rav Kook answered this question: It is not because conquering and dwelling in Eretz Yisrael is less of a mitzvah that he does not count it but, on the contrary, because it is greater than the other mitzvot. The Rambam explained in his principles for which mitzvot are included among the 613 mitzvot that he does not include general mitzvot which apply to the entire Torah (fourth principle). The mitzvah of conquering and dwelling in Eretz Yisrael is a general mitzvah since the essence of observing the entire Torah and all of its mitzvot is in Eretz Yisrael in particular. As a result, "Dwelling in Eretz Yisrael is equal to all of the other mitzvot in the Torah" (Sifri Devarim 11:17). One who looks in the Sefer Ha-Mitzvot of the Rambam, in the mitzvah of sanctifying the new month, can see how the Rambam understood the mitzvah of settling Eretz Yisrael as the root of all of the mitzvot (mitzvah 153). The Or Ha-Chaim Ha-Kadosh similarly wrote: "For dwelling in the Land is a mitzvah which encompasses the entire Torah" (Devarim 30:20). This

² The Tosefta (Aramaic: *Additions, Supplements*) is a compilation of the Jewish oral law from the period of the Mishnah. Also found in the Sifri (Devarim 11:17): "Rabbi Elazar ben Shamma and Rabbi Yochanan HaSandlar set out to Nitzivim [in Babylonia] to study Torah from Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira. But when they arrived in Sidon, they remembered the land of Israel. They lifted their eyes, and their tears flowed. They rent their garments and read this verse: "*You will expel them and dwell in their land*" (Deut. 12:29). They returned to their homes and declared: Dwelling in the land of Israel is equivalent to all of the mitzvot of the Torah."

³ Rabbi Shlomo Chaim Ha-Cohain Aviner (born 1943/5703) is the Rosh yeshiva of the Ateret Yerushalayim yeshiva (formerly known as Ateret Cohanim) in Jerusalem and the Rabbi of Bet El. He is considered one of the spiritual leaders of the Religious Zionist movement

mitzvah is the root and foundation which stands above all of the mitzvot, the Rambam therefore does not enumerate it⁴.

The Torah Temimah⁵ suggests that living in Israel is a foundational concept: it is impossible to fulfill all of the Torah's commandments except in Eretz Yisrael, because many of them depend on the Land, as is well known. And even those mitzvot that depend on the body were given mainly to be kept in Eretz Yisrael; that is their entire purpose...The reason we keep them in the Diaspora is only so that they are not forgotten when the Jews return to the Land...Therefore, it follows that the Mitzvah of dwelling in the Land is equal to all the rest, because it is the foundation and basis of the fulfillment of all the mitzvot.

In addition the **Abarbanel** writes (Yeshayahu 5): It is impossible for the Jewish nation to reach perfection anywhere outside the Chosen Land.

Make sure to emphasize the potential that they have while they are still in Israel. The growth and progress they can make while in Israel is not comparable to what they can do at home. We have many teachings about the possibility to acquire wisdom and Torah in Eretz Yisrael which far surpasses anywhere else.

Avot DeRebbe Nasan 18:2- Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says: when a sage who lived in Eretz Yisrael leaves the Land he declines, so that any sage living in Eretz Yisrael will outrank him. But although he declines, he still outranks the greatest sages of other countries. Torah like the Torah of Eretz Yisrael and no wisdom like the wisdom of Eretz Yisrael.

Baba Batra 158b - The air of Eretz Yisrael makes one wise

The easiest way to explain these concepts I have found is to say that we are simply closer to God when we are in Israel. Israel does not have an angel protecting it like other countries. Israel

⁴ Sichot Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah – Eretz Yisrael p. 100, Le-Netivot Yisrael vol. 1 p. 121 [161], Ha-Rav David Cohain Ha-Nazir in the booklet "Hitnotzetzut Or Ha-Geulah p. 17, Ha-Rav Shlomo Goren in Torat Ha-Moadim p. 36 and Torat Ha-Shabbat Ve-Ha-Moed p. 150 and Shut Tzitz Eliezer 7:48 in Kuntres Orchot Ha-Mishpatim chap. 12 - in the name of Maran Ha-Rav Kook

⁵ Written by Baruch Epstein or Baruch ha-Levi Epstein (1860-1941) was a Lithuanian rabbi, best known for his *Torah Temimah* commentary on the Torah. He was the son of Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein, rabbi of Novarodok and author of the work *Arukh HaShulchan*.

has the protection from God himself (like we say in the Haggadah). Therefore, all things come clearer to a person when in Israel.⁶

Midrash tehillim 105 – Rabbi Yosi bar Chalafta said to Rabbi Yishmael, his son: “Do you want to see the Shechina (Divine Presence) in this world? Study Torah in Eretz Yisrael.

In order to discuss this issue at length it is worthwhile to read through (what you can) of the Israel declaration of independence. It is outlined there what the purpose of Israel really is to the founding members of the current state. Before you read it ask the NCSYers to list what they think are the important reasons for the Jewish people to have a state. After reading see what is inside and what is not. (see below)

Wrap up – after learning a little about what Israel is, ask them how many people really know the truth about Israel. Because of its effect on the world (see below from prager university) people often misconstrue facts about Israel. This is a comedian doing a sketch, but sadly it’s not scripted: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzzDGqYTjAQ&feature=related>

VIDEOS TO SHOW

The Haiti clip (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TorlYLSUi_4&feature=related) - about helping the world - Operation Moses, which is about the importance Israel places to be able to have a place for all Jews to call home (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H587yp3rhKY>)

If you want to show a video which talks about the mid-east crisis a worthwhile video to show is from Prager university: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63hTOaRu7h4>

JUST LIKE A WAIVING FLAG

*The next subject we will be discussing is very sensitive and emotional. Please be careful when discussing it with your TJJers and try to make sure every opinion is heard. Don’t make a TJJer feel inadequate because of his/her opinion. If you have any personal stories, you can share them to show your TJJers that the following issue is serious and a real- especially in Israel. In this session, we will be discussing the topic of **Pidyon Shvuyim**, the redeeming of Jewish prisoners.*

⁶ See Ramban Vayikra 18:25. Also see Michtav MeEliyahu, vol.3, page 194-5

The session will begin with an introduction to the topic. Then you will break up the Chabura groups into two teams. Each team will then have about 15 minutes to prepare their arguments. Once each team is ready, you will hold a mock debate arguing each side. After the debate, you will have a wrap up discussion. Good luck!

INTRODUCTION

Before we begin our topic, there are two facts about Israel that you should know.

FACT ONE: On July 5th 1950 the Knesset (Israeli Legislature) enacted the 'Law of Return'. The law grants immediate citizenship to Jews (having a Jewish mother or maternal grandmother), individuals with Jewish ancestry (having a Jewish father or grandfather) and converts to Judaism. This means that any Jew in the world has the right at any time to move to Israel and acquire citizenship. Israel is the only country in the world that has a law of return based on religion and nationality. This law is important because it shows the world that Israel is the homeland for all Jews and that it is prepared to absorb and protect any Jew in the world.

FACT TWO- The Holocaust and WWII ended in 1945. That same year the UN was founded to replace the League of Nations; to stop wars between countries and to provide a meeting place for international dialogue. The world looked to the UN to grapple with how to help the Jewish survivors and refugees of the Holocaust. The UN was also charged with the responsibility to ensure that another Holocaust would never take place again in the world.

On November 29, 1947, the UN voted to partition Palestine; there would be two states in Palestine, one Jewish and one Arab. The Jews accepted this plan, but the Arab population rejected the plan and went to war. On May 14th 1948 the Jews living in Palestine declared Israel an independent state, and that day, the neighboring Arab countries attacked the fledgling, new state. The State of Israel fought a desperate war to ensure the perpetuation of a Jewish homeland that would serve, if necessary, as a place of security and refuge for every Jew in the world.

On December 10th 1948, the UN drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This Declaration was to ensure that another Holocaust would never happen again. Given the strong connection between the Holocaust and Israel's creation, it is easy to see that Israel values human rights. Israel understands that every human being is an entire world and that every person deserves his/her rights. As such, Israel will go to great lengths to protect its citizens and Jews across the world (You might want to share with the group the story of Yoni Netanyahu and the 1976 Israeli raid on Entebbe).

THE DEBATE – EXCHANGING TERRORISTS OF ISRAELI SOLDIERS

You will now break up the group into two. You will make sure there is at least one advisor in each group. You will then hand each group their source packets and give them about 20 minutes to prepare. If they need more time, please give them more time.



Before they break up into groups please explain that to most American Jews, the issue of ransoming captives (Pidyon Shvuyim) may seem remote, but to Israelis, it is very much a real question. Numerous times in Israel's history, the government has been faced with the question of whether to exchange exceedingly large numbers of terrorists for a handful of Israeli captives or corpses.

Each part of the debate will last 2 minutes (be strict!). The debate will look like this:

Opening Statements- PRO-EXCHANGING TERRORISTS FOR SOLDIERS

Opening Statements- AGAINST-EXCHANGING TERRORISTS FOR SOLDIERS

Questions- Pro asks Against

Rebuttal- Against answers Pro

Questions- Against asks Pro

Rebuttal- Pro answers Against

Ending Statements- Pro

Ending Statements- Against

THE WRAP UP

The purpose of this session is not to give definite answers. This debate has been going on for years by the Israel's most competent politicians and activists. This session is only a small glimpse of what the Israeli government debates on a weekly basis. Unfortunately, this is a very real issue as most recently Gilad Shalit was under lock and key by Hamas in the Gaza Strip for over five years, until his release on 18 October 2011 as part of a prisoner exchange deal.

We know that there is a mitzvah to free a Jewish prisoner. We know that our enemies take advantage of our commitment and obligation to help our incarcerated brothers. They know that we will seriously weigh and contemplate exchanging thousands of terrorist for one Jewish soldier.

Despite Gilad Shalit's release this last year the Israeli government and their soldiers worry about this unfortunate situation every day.

- What if the Israeli government decides the price is too high?
- How long can they risk leaving someone in a terrorist prison before it's too late?
- If you were a soldier, would you defend your country knowing that the country might not redeem you?

This is a dialogue you can continue even after the program comes to an end. Studies (Aish HaTorah, Honest Reporting) have shown that when teenagers connect to and advocate for Israel by learning about current events and by following Israel in the news - in the long run – they will identify more strongly with their Judaism. After all, if they stand up for the Jewish State, won't they stand up as well for their own Judaism?

THE COLD HARD FACTS

The theme of this session is Israel. Some of you may have spent a year learning in Israel, some of you may have visited Israel many times, some of you might support Israel through your advocacy work in America, and some of you may have done all of the above. With your experiences, you will have a lot to add to this session!

The questions we want to raise in this session are: What makes Israel different than every other country in the world? What is so special about Israel?

I know that all of you have a special place in your heart for our homeland. However, sometimes it hard to convey and articulate the passion we feel in our hearts. Therefore, in this session we will use cold, hard facts to show what makes Israel so special. My hope is that through these cold, hard facts we will be able to speak more articulate our love more profoundly Israel.

GETTING STARTED

This session can be very fun, but it can also get out of hand very easily. Make sure you have read over the session at least one time before you begin. Most TJers will get into the session fairly quickly. For the TJers you see sitting on the side, make sure they get involved somehow (make them answer a question or two). This should be a topic that is on everyone's mind. Sometimes we just need to supply the trigger questions to get their feelings out of them.

The session will begin with an activity followed by a discussion. The purpose of the activity is to show the TJers with physical evidence how much Israel has contributed to the world. The

follow-up discussion will be to decide if these contributions make Israel unique from the rest of the world.

PART I- ISRAEL VS. THE WORLD

MATERIALS (MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THESE):

- Brown Bag
- Cold Hard Facts or CHF
 - a. These are to be cut up and placed inside the paper bag
- Jump Rope
 - a. Or a similar device that can serve as a demarcation between two groups
- One large cut-out picture of Israel
- One large cut-out picture of the World

SETUP AND PLAY

Place the jump rope on the floor, and place the two large pictures on either side of it with the text facing up. Stand in the middle with the bag and have each TJJer walk forward -one at a time - and pick a CHF from the bag. After they pick a CHF, they should decide if that CHF originated in Israel or the rest of the world, and stand on the appropriate side of the jump rope—i.e. Israel or The World. This is also called “voting with your feet”.

In the end, you should have all the CHF’s placed on the ground on their respected sides and form a circle around them. You want the TJJers to clearly see how many CHF’s are on the Israel side. It would be appropriate to discuss why your TJJers chose their particular side. Encourage everyone to contribute to the conversation.

PROBLEMS THAT MAY ARISE

You might also encounter a group of TJJers that think they “caught on” and say that every CHF belongs on the Israel side. If this happens, please make sure to generate debate. Also, not every CHF will apply to Israel so they will be wrong if they think everything CHF relates to Israel.

PART II- PROCESSING THE ACTIVITY

Have everyone sit around the two sides and begin the processing activity.

Here is an outline for the discussion. Please feel free to guide the discussion in any direction you like. The outline is just a suggestion. But please don't forget the goal of this session. Israel is not only unique because Hashem selected it as his Holy Land, but in addition, it is especially unique today because of the contribution the country is making to the world. We should love and support Israel as a Jew because it is our Promised Land, but also because without Israel, the world would be a darker place.

THE DISCUSSION

- What are our connections to Israel?
 - An emotional attachment
 - God promised us the land of Israel thousands of years ago
 - Israel was promised to the Jews in 1947 which many believe was a result of the Holocaust
 - Nuances of Jewish law and Torah culture saturate Israel's secular society (i.e. Buses don't run in many cities on Shabbat; the sale of bread on Pesach is prohibited)
 - Stories of the Bible and other major Jewish historical event took place in Israel
 - A materialistic attachment
 - Israel has contributed a plethora of things to the world
 - The Start-up Nation – research Shai Agassi's "A Better Place"
 - Israel is a leader in solving medical, environmental, technological, and terrorist-related problems
- What makes Israel unique?
 - Should Non-Jews care if Israel survives?
- Why should we continue fighting for it?

THE WRAP UP

The point of this session was to show the TJers that Israel is not only important on a religious level. Israel has made incredible contributions the world. Israel must remain on the map.

The last thing you should do is hand out the article by Pat Boone and read it together (or read it beforehand and paraphrase it). The bolded parts are the important parts that **MUST** be read out loud).