

## Rabbi's Article III

### *Holy, Chosen or Both*

On the verse in our *parsha* (-Maasei; Numbers 33:53), "You shall clear out the Land and settle in it, for I have given you the Land to occupy it," there are opinions (Nachmanides; -[Link](#)) who count as one of the 613 Mitzvot (-Positive Precept #4) to live in Israel, and that because of this mitzvah (-Kesubot 110b), "He who leaves her (Israel) is as if he is serving idols." Maimonides (-[Link](#)), on the other hand, does not count this as one of the 613 Mitzvot, although, he defines the law to live in Israel, even stating (-Laws of Kings, Chapter 5, Law 9), "At all times, a person should dwell in Eretz Yisrael even in a city whose population is primarily gentile, rather than dwell in the Diaspora, even in a city whose population is primarily Jewish." Let us understand Maimonides' opinion on living in Israel, and we will do so by exploring the closing of this law: "Just as it is forbidden to leave the chosen land for the Diaspora, it is also forbidden to leave Babylon for other lands as it states (-Jeremiah 27:22): 'They shall be brought to Babylon and there they shall be until I take heed of them... and restore them to this place.'" So, Maimonides gives a verse as the reason for this law, while Rashi (-[Link](#); *ibid*, 111a, d"h Kach Ossur) gives the logical reason of, "Because over there are yeshivot (schools of Torah-study) continuously disseminating Torah." The legal difference between Maimonides and Rashi would be concerning today, when the Torah Center of our people isn't in Babylon, does the prohibition still apply (Maimonides, because of the verse), or NOT (Rashi, because the reason is gone).

What does Maimonides mean with, "Just as it is forbidden to leave the chosen land... forbidden to leave Babylon?! He is expressing that the reason it is forbidden to leave Babylon is the same as for leaving Israel. Hence, according to Maimonides, what is the reason that it is forbidden to leave Israel?

In general there are two differences between Israel and all other lands: (i) (-Tanchuma, Re'eh 8), "Cherished is the Land of Israel, which the Holy One, blessed be He, chose her." (ii) The fact that the Land of Israel is a holy land." Hence, the two connections between the Jewish People --who are (i) chosen, and (ii) holy-- with the Land of Israel. Therefore, there are two contexts to the prohibition of a Jew leaving Israel: (i) Leaving the holy land, which is connected with the mitzvot that exist only in the Land of Israel, and (ii) leaving the land which G-d chose for His chosen nation. Maimonides is telling us, "Just as it is forbidden," because the Land of Israel is chosen by G-d for his chosen nation, "it is also forbidden," for the duration of exile, because G-d chose that "They shall be brought to Babylon and there they shall be until I take heed of them." This means, that Rashi defines the land of Israel's being chosen because the Jewish people (and their Torah Center) are there, while Maimonides defines the Jewish peoples being there, because it (Land of Israel, and during exile, Babylon) was chosen by G-d. Therefore, according to Rashi, one may say that if another land becomes the Torah Center of our people, the prohibition of leaving Babylon would carry over to that land, while according to Maimonides, the verse's defining Babylon as the chosen place for the entire duration of exile remains. However, needless to say, the aspect of Israel being a holy land does not transfer to Babylon.

Nevertheless, just as we find that one may leave Israel in order to earn a living, and in order to study Torah, so too, one may leave Babylon for these reasons, hence, we find in the Talmud, that the very teacher (Shmuel) of the sage that said the law (Rabbi Yehudah, *in the name of Shmuel!*) left from Babylon to Israel in order to study there Torah. However, if one's Torah-study style is aligned with the style of study in Israel, hence, he continues to grow there, he may stay there indefinitely, while, if one's study style is more aligned with the Babylonian study style --like Shmuel's was-- hence, Shmuel returned to Babylon, where the very teachings he received in Israel reached their truest depths for him, in his innate Babylonian style of Torah-study.

These two virtues of the Land of Israel --that it is (i) chosen and (ii) holy--, exist within the relationship between G-d and the Jewish people, as well. G-d chose the Jewish people, and the Jewish people are holy because we are connected to G-d's Torah and Mitzvot. The difference between these two virtues is that our being holy is not about our essence, but about G-d giving us Torah and Mitzvot. However, G-d's choosing the Jewish nation, speaks of, not a logical relationship, due to any virtue that we may have that other nations don't (such as Torah, Mitzvot and its holiness), but rather, of an essence relationship, which is unconditional, for it isn't built on any condition. This is the true meaning of choosing. Hence, our sages teach us (-Zohar Vol III, 73a), "There are three knots that bind one to another, Israelites to Torah, and Torah to the Holy One, blessed be He..." However, this is just two knots ((ii) Israelites to Torah and (ii) Torah to G-d)? There is also, however, the (third) knot between the Israelite and G-d, directly, in G-d choosing him unconditionally, --and not just the knot through Torah and Mitzvot.

Nevertheless, there is a virtuous point to our relationship with G-d, based on our being holy, through G-d's Torah and Mitzvot, over our unconditionally being chosen by G-d. Our being chosen by G-d has nothing to do with us, but is all about G-d's choosing us, therefore, even after our being chosen by G-d, one cannot see in a clear recognizable fashion our being chosen, for it is connected to our essence, and hence, is not making a change in our outward character or behavior. However, our holiness through Torah and Mitzvot is in itself a virtue that is open and recognizable within us. And therefore, it is through the connection with G-d of our holiness of Torah and Mitzvot that reveals to us our essence in which G-d has chosen. Hence, you first have the two knots which connect us to G-d through the holiness of Torah and Mitzvot, which then reveal to us the third knot of G-d's unconditionally choosing our essence.

So too, it is with the Land of Israel (unlike Babylon), in which there is both, the being chosen and the being holy, in which the holiness of the Land of Israel, in its special mitzvot, reveal the G-d's choosing the essence of the Land of Israel.