

## Why didn't (all) the Gedolim make Aliya?

### 1. Kuzari 2:23-24

Khazari: If this be so [that there is an obligation to dwell in Israel], thou fallest short of the duty laid down in thy law, by not endeavoring to reach that place, and making it thy abode in life and death, although thou sayest: 'Have mercy on Zion, for it is the house of our life,' and believest that the Shekhinah will return thither. ...

The Rabbi: This is a severe reproach, O king of the Khazars. It is the sin which kept the divine promise with regard to the second Temple, viz.: Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion' (Zachariah 2:10), from being fulfilled. Divine Providence was ready to restore everything as it had been at first, if they had all willingly consented to return. But only a part was ready to do so, whilst the majority and the aristocracy remained in Babylon, preferring dependence and slavery, and unwilling to leave their houses and their affairs.

### 2. Tosafot on Ketubot 110b

It is not common to move to Israel nowadays merely because the roads are dangerous. Rabbeinu Chaim says, however, that there is no obligation at all nowadays to live in Israel, because there are many Mitzvot that apply only in the land of Israel, and we lack the expertise to be sufficiently careful regarding them and fulfill them properly.

### 3. Avnei Nezer, Yoreh De'ah, Siman 453:

However, the matter that raises a doubt for us—whether it is an obligation even in our times—is because if so, Heaven forbid, all of Israel would be transgressing a great positive commandment, one that is considered equal to all the other commandments.

Indeed, in the words of the *Terumat HaDeshen* (Siman 88), this is somewhat resolved due to the presence of informers (mosrim) found there, and also because of the wickedness of the Ishmaelites (Muslims), and the difficulty of securing food. However, it has already been quite some time since there have been informers, and the government oversees and places fear on the Ishmaelites. The only remaining concern is the difficulty of acquiring sustenance.

Nevertheless, there were great Torah scholars for whom, undoubtedly, the Jewish people supported them even there (in the Land of Israel). And if the reason is in order not to become dependent on others, as the *Me'il Tzedakah* (Siman 26) wrote—there are many who, even while in the Diaspora, need gifts from others.

Moreover, fundamentally, I do not know if, regarding a constant mitzvah that is equivalent to all the other mitzvot, we can say that in order not to rely on others, one should forgo it. Also, the danger of traveling no longer applies in our days.

The *Kuzari* (Book 2, section 23) posed a difficulty—why Jews don't go up to the Land of Israel. See there. And the *Haver* (Rabbi) admitted and said, "You have embarrassed me, King of the Khazars." See there.

Nevertheless, Heaven forbid that we should accuse the great sages of Israel of being mistaken or, God forbid, intentional transgressors.

Now, if a person were to live in the Land of Israel and had no means of livelihood there other than what is sent to him from the Diaspora—and his sustenance is still dependent on a noble from outside the land—what sort of settlement in the Land of Israel is this?

And this seems to me the reason why the great ones did not travel to the Land of Israel. Although it may be said that they were sent only money, and they purchased and ate the fruits of the Land of Israel, it still seems more logical that in such a case, their sustenance is considered to be from the Diaspora.

#### **4. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik**

17 Tammuz 5767 (1967) Her honour, Madam Miriam Shiloh, שתחיה

Shalom uVerachah! I request forgiveness for not addressing her letter immediately, and delaying until now. It was difficult for me, and it remains difficult, to write. I am immersed in mourning for the death of my beloved wife, the pupil of my eye and beloved of my soul, of blessed memory. My world has collapsed and is ruined. Even now, I write with tears and with the blood of my torn and agitated heart.

I thank her for her words, and I accept her rebuke willingly. In truth, I have sinned against the Holy Land. I am among those who have been slow. Of course, many causes, which do not depend upon me, have delayed me – but I do not seek an excuse, and I do not justify myself. I have sinned, and the [prisoner's] chain hangs from my neck.

Last year we decided, my wife z"l and I, to come to the Land and to spend six months there, to see the land and the nation dwelling there. But many thoughts are in the heart of man, and what happened happened, and my sighs are many and my heart grieves!

Many of my acquaintances and friends who dwell in the Land and in the Diaspora encourage me to come now. Madam also emphasized in her letter that it is now a propitious time as well as a time of spiritual crisis. But our sages tell us of an "Arch of Accounting" which was situated outside of Jerusalem, because one who takes accounts and finds his account lacking is upset, and regarding Jerusalem it is written, "the joy of the entire earth". How much more so for the "Arch of Black Mourning" in which I am currently found, that it must be outside Jerusalem. How could I now ascend to Jerusalem, when I am a man of a harsh and bitter spirit? G-d is not manifest when one is depressed, upset and pained.

Madam need not justify her words. I, too, am a simple Jew. In the language of the Sages of Yavneh (Berachot 17), I would say: I am a teacher, and many work with the community

in the field of Torah education, as teachers. My work is in the large city of New York, in an institution with many students, and their work is in Givat Washington or in another community in a small institution. Whether one does much or little, so long as one directs his heart toward Heaven. The work all of us do is dedicated to nurturing the values of Judaism, the ancestral tradition and the Torah of our masters, authors of the tradition and its sages.

With great respect,

Yosef Dov haLevi Soloveitchik

## **5. Rav Menachem Mendel Schneerson as noted by Rav Shlomo Goren**

There is no doubt that the Rebbe himself was endowed with superhuman physical and spiritual powers. I witnessed this myself several times when I had private audiences with him. Four times over four consecutive years, I met with the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson of blessed memory, and each time I spent more than four hours in his presence. The meetings always began at 11:30 p.m., and I sat with him until nearly four in the morning. When I rose to take my leave, claiming I was tired, the Rebbe expressed surprise at me—he was older than I was, yet appeared refreshed as if he had just awoken from a full night's sleep.

In all four visits, when we discussed matters of Torah and the State of Israel, I always ended the conversation with the question that constantly troubled me: Why does the Rebbe not visit Israel, especially when he has tens of thousands of followers there who long to hear his words in person? In each conversation, he gave a different reason for not coming.

**The first time**, he told me he had not left Lubavitch since becoming Rebbe. He promised me that if he were ever to leave his court in Lubavitch, the first place he would go would be the Land of Israel.

This answer puzzled me, and I asked what he meant. After all, he lived in New York, not in Lubavitch, which is in Russia. He replied, "We have transplanted Lubavitch here. We do not live in New York at all." I pressed further, noting that he visits the grave of his father-in-law (the previous Rebbe) every Friday. He explained that the Chabad community had created a symbolic "Lubavitch corridor" stretching from the study hall to the gravesite of the sixth Rebbe, his father-in-law, of blessed memory. I accepted this explanation as best I could, and we parted near dawn.

**The following year**, I was again invited to meet the Rebbe at the same time and place. Once again, we spoke until close to 4:00 a.m. As we parted, I again asked: If Israel is so close to his heart and so holy to him, why does he never visit?

This time, the Rebbe answered that he had been ready to visit Israel, but then realized that if he were to go, he would not be able to leave. His large community in the Diaspora would be left without a leader. Moreover, he added, leaving the Holy Land—sanctified

with ten levels of holiness—to go abroad would not be fitting according to Jewish law. He referenced the sages of Israel who, when leaving the Land and reaching places like Sidon, would recall the Land of Israel, lift their eyes, weep, rend their garments, and recite the verse: “You shall possess it and dwell in it” (Deut. 11:31). They declared that dwelling in the Land of Israel is equivalent to all the commandments in the Torah, and they returned to the Land. I accepted his words in silence.

**The third year**, I again traveled to the U.S. and was again invited to a long, open-ended meeting with the Rebbe. That time, we debated at length about the State of Israel, the IDF, and current events. As the night drew to a close, I once again raised my usual question: Why does the Rebbe not visit Israel?

This time, the Rebbe gave a more complex answer. He said that he had, in fact, begun preparations to visit Israel. But during the planning, he realized that none of the six previous Chabad Rebbes had visited Israel. How could he be the one to break precedent?

I responded immediately: One cannot compare the earlier Rebbes to the current situation. Back then, there was no State of Israel, and there were not millions of Jews living there. Today, there are multitudes of followers and ordinary people whose spirits would be uplifted and inspired by a visit from the Rebbe—perhaps even sparking a new wave of immigration.

The Rebbe replied: If visiting the Land of Israel were considered important from the perspective of Chassidut, the previous Rebbes would have gone with *mesirut nefesh* (self-sacrifice). Since they did not, this must be a sign that there is a heavenly decree preventing Chabad Rebbes from going to Israel.

Since I was not sufficiently knowledgeable about Chabad history, I accepted his words and took my leave in silence.

Every time I met with the Rebbe in New York, he would entrust me with a Torah message to deliver to Kfar Chabad. This time as well, he gave me a Torah insight to share at a public gathering in the village. When I recounted the Rebbe’s reason for not visiting Israel, an elderly Chabad rabbi—formerly a rabbi in Lubavitch—expressed astonishment. He reminded me that the Rebbe’s father-in-law, the sixth Rebbe, had once visited Israel and had prayed at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron. How could the current Rebbe not have been aware of this?

For a year, I remained silent. Then, when I returned to the U.S. the following year, I again received an invitation to visit the Rebbe. As before, I entered at 11:30 p.m. The Rebbe was already waiting for me at the entrance to his study hall. As we stood by the door, exchanging greetings, he immediately said:

"Surely you are puzzled by what I told you last year—that I decided not to visit Israel because the six previous Rebbes did not visit. And yet, my father-in-law, the sixth Rebbe, did in fact visit the Land and pray at the graves of the Patriarchs in Hebron."

The Rebbe continued, still standing with me at the entrance: "Now I will reveal to you the full truth of why we do not visit the Land, even though my father-in-law did.

The holy work of the Chabad Rebbes is bound to the sacred graves of the previous Rebbes. All the written and oral requests we receive—I bring them to the holy graves, and through them, we invoke divine mercy.

In my father-in-law's time, he had no such grave to visit. The burial sites of the earlier Rebbes were still in Russia, inaccessible to us. He had no choice but to travel to the Land of Israel and deliver the petitions at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron.

But now, we (meaning himself) have access to my father-in-law's gravesite right here. We can bring requests and prayers there every week. Therefore, we do not need to visit the Land of Israel, because we have here the resting place of the sixth Rebbe of Lubavitch."

In these words, I felt the Rebbe had revealed his whole heart. His sincerity was evident, and I understood that this was the true reason for his lifelong decision not to visit Israel. From that point on, I refrained from troubling him again with this question.

When I recounted all this to Chabad elders, they all agreed: it seemed the Rebbe had finally told me the absolute truth about his avoidance of visiting the Land. There was no need to search for further explanations.

I had never revealed the four answers he gave me on this matter—until now. Now, with his passing and ascent to the heavens, I found it fitting to disclose these words in the name of the one who said them.