



HOLY SITES IN ISRAEL

SHOSHANA JUDELMAN



Even the Dirt in Eretz Yisrael is Holy

Last Sunday I went with a group of other volunteers to work on a farm near Beit Shemesh. This farmer and hundreds of others are short-handed due to the flight of thousands of foreign workers since the massacres of October 7 and the resulting war. The bulk of our produce comes from these farms and the farmers are in dire need of help.

We were assigned the task of weeding Kalaniyot and, truthfully, it was hard work. We spent long hours bent low over the plants, digging deep with increasingly tender fingers to uproot weeds and free the Kalaniyot from their stranglehold. By the end of the day, our legs, hands, backs, and heads were aching from the labor.

But we were also energized by it, feeling a resurgence of love for the Land that is only acquired through suffering and hard work. It also reminded me of how I fell in love with Eretz Yisrael in the first place.

When I was 17, I spent two months on Kibbutz Maaleh Gilboa working in the fields, the carrot packing plant, and the date groves. I remember coming back to my room each afternoon aching, exhausted and transformed. It was then that the seeds of aliyah were planted in me, not to be acted upon for 23 years.

What is it about working in the fields of Eretz Yisrael that causes this response in Am Yisrael?

The Midrash tells us that Hashem said, “I will bring Yisrael, who are beloved to Me, into a Land that is beloved to Me.” This then is the paradigm. We are drawn to Eretz Yisrael because it is in our spiritual DNA. As Chazal tell us, Hashem’s presence rests in greater measure in Eretz Yisrael (Moed Katan 25a and Rashi), our Torah study is deeper here (VaYikra Rabbah 13), all blessings are drawn down through the Land of Israel (VaYikra Rabbah 24), and mitzvos can be fulfilled to their greatest extent here (Ramban, Vayikra 18:25).

And further, as Rav Kook teaches, the soul of Am Yisrael receives life force through being connected to Eretz Yisrael and the kedusha of Eretz Yisrael is drawn out through Am Yisrael’s presence, a kind of symbiotic relationship.

Quite simply, the more contact we have with the Land, the more we affect this metaphysical sequence.

It is said that R’ Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld would take circuitous paths when he walked from one place to another. When he was asked why he didn’t just take the

shortest route, he responded that the Arvei Nachal teaches that every spot in Eretz Yisrael corresponds to a different part of Torah. Through his walking, R' Sonnenfeld was forging a connection to these different parts of Torah.

So, in looking for holy sites in which we can open our hearts, let us look no further than every single inch of our Holy Land. In Eretz Yisrael even the dirt is holy and recognizing that enables us to activate a deeper connection to the Land, to Hashem, to Am Yisrael and, of course, to ourselves. ■

Shoshana teaches Chassidus for the Shirat David Community in Efrat as well as in Jerusalem for Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya and Shiviti Women's Institute. She is a guide in Poland with JRoots and co-leads inspirational trips to Ukraine and around Eretz Yisroel. Shoshana has also been a guide at Yad Vashem since 2014.

רפואה שלמה

Yosef Ezriel ben Chaya Michal
Chana bat Bruriah

Benzion Simcha Mendel Ben Chana Rachel

Feyge Sara bas Chaya Peshe

Nechama Charna bat Feigel

Leah Naomi bat Tova

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