



Is Now the Time to Settle the Land of Israel?

What is the right timing for settling the Land of Israel? For over fifty years, all the consecutive governments of Israel have thought that the present is not the right time for Jews to settle in the parts of the Land of Israel liberated in the Six-Day War. There have always been considerations and various explanations, but the conclusion is always the same: Not now.

It is important to declare sovereignty over all the parts of the Land of Israel that are in our hands. A political declaration that goes no farther than the paper it is printed on, however, is worthless. Sovereignty has to go hand in hand with a policy of actual settlement.

If not now, when?

Sadly, the politicians attempting to lead us without faith in God and without commitment to the Torah are mistaken once again. Instead of the hesitant, "Not now" the Torah says, "If not now, when?" This is a general principle that is relevant to every individual.

In the public arena, we can learn from the first person to conquer the Land of Israel. Joshua, the successor of Moses, brings the Nation of Israel into the Land of Israel and conquers it from the Canaanites. The process of conquering the Land is not finished in a day. A true leader knows that it is not always possible to finish a process immediately. On the contrary – Joshua was chosen because he knew how to persevere. He would report for duty day in and day out at Moses' tent, for decades. He was quiet and thorough.

Before Moses' passing, there was another person in the limelight: Pinchas the son of Elazar, the son of Aaron the Priest. But despite the well-deserved praise for Pinchas for his zealous act, he was not appointed to lead Israel. Leadership must include moderation. The leader must know how to include each and every person in his flock.

Joshua and every leader of Israel, however, must be careful not to allow their moderation and discretion to metamorphose into laziness and negligence. The sages do not make exceptions for anyone and they criticize Joshua on this

specific point: “Many days did Joshua... make war”¹ and Rashi on the verse explains, “The verse speaks of him critically.” Joshua should have conquered the Land of Israel at a faster pace and completed it in his lifetime. True, impetuosity is not a positive character trait, but one should definitely act with alacrity – tempered alacrity, the formula prescribed by the Ba’al Shem Tov.

But the Torah itself says, “I will drive them out from before you slowly.”² It is a long process. Why criticize Joshua?

We must differentiate between God’s actions and our role. Those things that are not dependent upon us sometimes take time. We want Mashiach now, but God determines the pace and He has good reason for the rate of developments. But for everything in our hands, the rule is “One should perform mitzvot with alacrity.”³ We should never let any opportunity go by.

Connection Points

We can understand the great value of settling the Land of Israel according to the words of the prophet: “For as a young man unites with a virgin, so your sons will unite with you.”⁴ The Radak on this verse explains, “The Land of Israel, as long as the nations of the world were living there, was not called ‘married’ for they were not accepted by the Land and their dwelling was not appropriate to it...but when Israel will return to its midst, it is like the uniting of a young man with a virgin.” The Land of Israel is the bride and the Nation of Israel is the groom. As long as we are in foreign lands, the wedding is postponed. But when we return to the Land, the groom and bride unite in joy. Thus, every Jewish community in the Land of Israel is a meeting point between the nation and the land, the groom and the bride. This is the inner driving force for settling the land. We want the map to be filled with connection points between the Nation of Israel and the Land of Israel – with no black holes.

¹ Joshua 11:18.

² Exodus 23:30.

³ *Psachim* 4a.

⁴ Isaiah 62:5.