

RABBI YEHOSHUA ALT

Hungry for the Homeland

R' Yehonasan Eibshitz (Yaaros Devash, Drush 14, s.v. u'mizeh) writes: "What a great mitzva it is to desire Eretz Yisrael! The Shelah and Sefer Yeraim teach that a person should constantly have in his heart a desire and love for Eretz Yisrael as it says v'hayu eini v'libi sham kol ha'yamim, and your eyes and heart shall be there all the days (Melachim 1, 9:3). If a man has all that he desires, he should remember that he is lacking because he is not in Eretz Yisrael... He should be sad about that because the main thing is missing."

Many great people throughout history have yearned to come to Eretz Yisrael but never succeeded. In the past, coming to Eretz Yisrael was fraught with hardship and significant danger. It was a long trip under arduous conditions. Often, the ships were dilapidated, and the trip was always dangerous. Shipwrecks, killing all those on board, were not uncommon. When Rav Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk (1730-1788) headed an aliyah of Chassidim in 1777, one of the ships in his group sank during their voyage; thirty Jews died. Cruel captains would sometimes rob their passengers and subject them to mistreatment. Not infrequently, pirates raided the vessels, robbing and murdering the travelers or selling them into slavery. Roads were in poor condition. Travelers could expect to be confronted by robbers and murderous gangsters, and it wasn't unusual to be beaten and robbed of all one's possessions. For observant Jews, food and lodging for the lengthy journey presented additional problems. Birchas Hagomel was recited with passion and intense kavanah by any Jew fortunate enough to reach Eretz Yisrael.

The Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) attempted

to move to Eretz Yisrael. He intended to first go there himself, and then send for his family. However, his trip was beset by difficulties, and upon reaching as far as Amsterdam, he was forced to turn back. The Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760) tried to move to Eretz Yisrael in 1742. After many tribulations, which included being robbed of all his possessions, he reached as far as Constantinople before turning back. Rav Yaakov Emden (1697-1776) also tried to reach Eretz Yisrael but was compelled to end his journey before attaining his goal because of personal travails and health problems.

The Chazon Ish, who was in contact with the Chofetz Chaim (1838-1933) wrote that the Chofetz Chaim deeply yearned to move to Eretz Yisrael (Igras Chazon Ish 1:175). In 1880, the local rabbi in Radin moved to Eretz Yisrael; soon after, he sent a letter to the Chofetz Chaim, with whom he was close, describing his lofty spiritual discoveries there. This increased the Chofetz Chaim's yearning to travel to there. In 1881, the Chofetz Chaim's daughter got engaged to Rav Aharon Hakohen. In the tena'im (pre-marital contract), the Chofetz Chaim stipulated that he would provide the customary kestit, support for the married couple that one committed oneself to for a certain number of years. However, he stated clearly that should he (the Chofetz Chaim) move to Eretz Yisrael, he was absolved of his commitment. When his next daughter got engaged in 1884, to Rav Hersh Leib Levinson, he made the same stipulation. When the Chofetz Chaim married his second wife in 1904, he did so on the condition that she move to Eretz Yisrael when the time comes. In 1923,

when his youngest daughter married Rav Mendel Zaks, the Chofetz Chaim included this now-familiar clause in regards to the possibility of his moving to Eretz Yisrael in the tena'im.

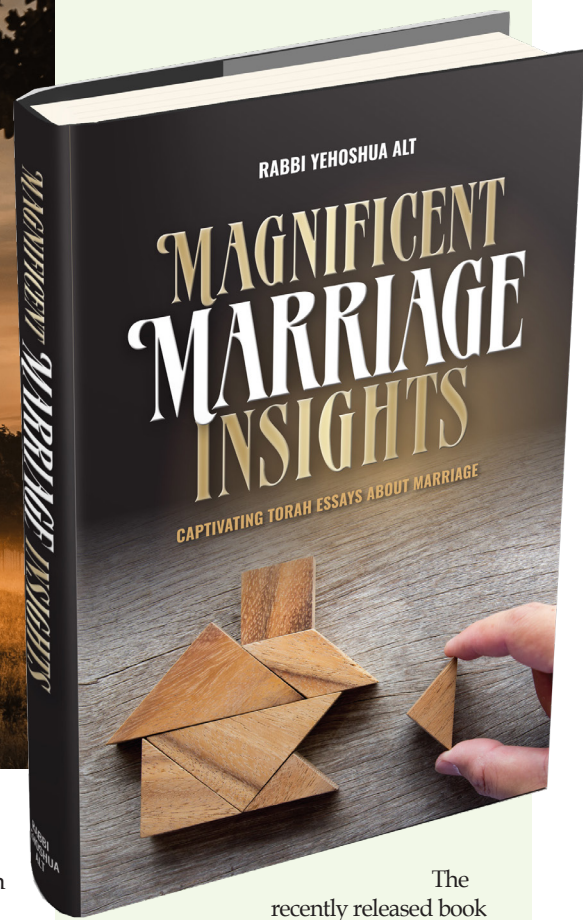
Towards the end of his life, the Chofetz Chaim made concrete plans to settle in Eretz Yisrael, deciding on Petach Tikva as where he was to live. Indeed, to prepare for his arrival, the Petach Tikva municipality built a spacious home for the Chofetz Chaim, along with public bathrooms, expecting that his presence would attract a large number of people to visit (She'al Avicha V'yageidcha, Volume 2, p. 89). But it was not to be, as unexpected events prevented him from moving to Israel.

In his sefer Eretz Yisrael (Ibid, p. 99), first published in 1950, Rav Yechezkel Michel Tucazinsky (1871-1955) recounts the unbelievable obstacles that Jews had to overcome in order to make their way to Eretz Yisrael, and their exceptional sacrifices in settling the land. He concludes:

And what about today? How easy it is to get to Eretz Yisrael! A flight by air from America takes just 36 hours (this was written in the late 1940's), and the trip by luxury liner, only two weeks. It is only an hour's car ride from Yaffo to Yerushalayim. All the roads are paved, and there's no shortage of water or basic food, or of electricity or fuel en route. The [Jewish] government is the master of the land; the gates are open to all. There...is no longer any necessity to pay bribes to the Turkish overlords, or to conduct other shady dealings with them. So what is lacking today? The strong desire that beat so strongly in the hearts of loyal Jews of earlier generations who lived in chutz la'aretz.

* Life in Yerushalayim over a century ago was more difficult than we can imagine. Most work had to be completed by nightfall, because the large and impoverished families could afford only a small amount of oil for their lamps. It was by the dim light cast by these flickering lamps that the women would complete their housework, and the men would sit until the late hours of the night absorbed in Torah study. It was only on Friday nights that these homes would be brightened by the flames of a glass bowl suspended from the ceiling by copper chains and filled with an ample supply of oil and wicks. The women's day began at dawn, with the arduous and time-consuming task of washing wheat kernels, grinding them, sifting the flour, and preparing dough. After this process was completed, they would have

to stand on line at one of the three baking ovens in the city and wait for their turn to have their bread baked. Sanitary conditions in the city were appalling. Many Middle-Eastern diseases were rampant, and malaria specifically took its deadly toll. The crowded living quarters and poverty were partly to blame, but even more responsible was the rotting garbage in the streets, which the municipal government simply refused to remove. This garbage soon became infested with flies and other insects that transmitted disease. Towards the end of the summer, the water in the cisterns became basically undrinkable, and spring water had to be brought into the city by Arab porters at outrageous prices. Travel on the roads, and even within the city itself, was very dangerous, due to the gangs of Arab bandits.



The recently released book "Magnificent Marriage Insights: Captivating Torah Essays about Marriage" is now available (as a paperback and Hardcover) for purchase and delivery on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B0BRDH7WG7> or by sending an email to yalt3285@gmail.com.

This comprehensive book tackles many questions, with life-altering insights and practical approaches. The more than 60 essays found within can facilitate bringing your dating journey to a happy ending and enrich any marriage. It makes a great gift for friends, relatives, business associates and learning partners.

Purchase it at <https://amzn.to/3eyh5xP>.

Some of the questions discussed in this book are the following.

Why do some people have a quick and smooth dating journey while others must travel along a lengthy and arduous path?

What is the Torah prescription for working on a marriage?

How are miscarriages viewed through the prism of Torah?

What is the Torah perspective on changing diapers and taking out the garbage?

Does marriage terminate with the death of a spouse?

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Thank you.