**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**Geulat Yisrael**

**Rav Moshe Taragin**

**Shiur #27: The Geometry of Judaism**

Torah, the land of Israel, and the Jewish people are all seminal values of Judaism and seem inseparable. But what is the relationship between them?

Many have suggested a metaphor which incorporates all three values into one inextricable "article." This approach views Torah, the Jewish people, and the land of Israel as comprising an indivisible triangle. Every triangle possesses three connected corners, without which the entire triangle would dismantle. No corner is more important than another. Similarly, Torah, the Jewish people and the land of Israel cannot be separated, nor can any of these fundamental elements of Judaism be assigned a greater value than any other.

My Rebbe, Harav Yehuda Amital, sharply disagreed with the triangle metaphor. Instead, he imagined these three values as three points on a continuous line, with their sequencing along the line based on their chronological order. On the 15th day of Nissan, we were transformed from a clan of slaves into a Jewish nation. Pesach was both our Independence Day and the day we were born as a nation. Only seven weeks later, on the 6th of Sivan, we received the celestial word of Hashem delivered atop a trembling mountain. The birth of our nation preceded the delivery of Torah.

Without a nation willing to embrace it, Torah could not have descended into our orbit. Of course, Torah itself, as it is the will of Hashem, is eternal; it predates human history and is unaffected by human volition. However, for Torah to descend into the human realm and affect human experience, it must be adopted and applied by humans. Until our nation was forged on Pesach, Torah had no place in this world. As the Jewish people are a precondition to Torah, they are the paramount value. *Am Yisrael* takes precedence over *Torat Yisrael*.

In a similar vein, the values of Jewish peoplehood and of Torah precede settling the land of Israel. Our initial itinerary had us voyaging to Israel a few weeks after receiving the Torah at Sinai. Sadly, we rerouted history and squandered forty years before reaching that milestone. However, the delay didn’t alter the fundamental sequence: first a people, then a Torah, and finally, a land.

Until we received the Torah, we had no warrant to the land. After liberating us from Egypt, Hashem revealed His direct Word so that we could model to the entire world a lifestyle of commandment and commitment. We were selected to live under the eye of Hashem, in His backyard, so that we could disseminate His message from His province. Without fidelity to Torah, our deed to the land of Israel is rescinded. Torah precedes the land of Israel. It was delivered first and is a precondition for our entry into the land.

The three values are all indispensable but are not of equal value. A line, not a triangle.

For thousands of years, we crafted religious identity based on two of these values. During the harsh exile, remarkably, we maintained a sturdy national identity, and we excelled at Torah study. Sadly, however, the third cardinal value – the land of Israel – remained a distant dream.

With our return, the land of Israel has come alive. We have rediscovered *mitzvot* of the land, we have become reacquainted with Israel's landscapes, and we have begun the arduous process of settling and inhabiting a land which had been vacant for centuries. We have rediscovered the "missing" third part of this "bundle" of Jewish connection.

Over the past 50 years in particular, the struggle to settle our land has captivated our collective imagination. We are no longer settling the coast or the north, but are now laying new roots in ancient Biblical fields. We have returned to Yerushalayim and the surrounding Biblical corridor. We are essentially walking back into Tanakh. International opposition to our presence in these regions merely reinforces the prophetic nature of our settlements. We are living through a historical faceoff that revolves around a city at the center of human history. Without passion, courage, and sacrifice, we will not triumph.

Have we gone too far? Have we ignored other values? Have we overinvested in land settlement at the cost of prior values? Have we unleashed a golem which has turned back on its master with an insatiable appetite? If Jewish peoplehood, Torah, and the land of Israel are a triangle, this question is moot: investment in one "corner" affects them all, so that by settling Israel, we are bolstering our peoplehood and strengthening Torah commitment. If, however, the three values are a line, this question becomes very troubling. Have we placed too much emphasis upon "derivative" aspects of Judaism, at the expense of "origin" or "source" components?

Have we been sufficiently sensitive to social issues which affect *Am Yisrael*? We are deeply committed to the spiritual nature of Israeli society, paying heed to national religious issues such as Shabbat, *kashrut*, and conversion. However, we may have neglected larger national agendas such as social welfare, economic equality, and the general moral tone of our surrounding culture. Religious people have largely ignored these agendas, while they have been eagerly adopted by secular factions. Did we prioritize land over people? Did we invert the sequence of the "line"?

There may be an additional cost to our disproportionate concern with the land of Israel: it seems that Torah study and Torah commitment have also been insufficiently attended to. With great sadness, we have witnessed outsized percentages of a younger generation opting out of classic Orthodox identity. It is always dangerous to generalize; we can discuss a myriad of possible factors driving this distressing phenomenon. But it is fair to ask whether we have placed sufficient emphasis upon Torah study and halakhic commitment. Perhaps we overinvested communal resources in settling the land, at the expense of the study and consideration of Torah. Interestingly, many who abandon classic religious behavior still maintain deep commitment to land and its settlement. Is this a reflection of our community's passionate devotion to land, but listless commitment to Torah? Did the younger generation sense what was "truly" important to us?

*Am Yisrael,* Torah, and Land*:* a line, not a triangle.