

7. *Eretz Yisrael (The Land of Israel)*

INTRODUCTION

The establishment of *Medinat Yisrael* (the modern State of Israel) has facilitated the return of *Am Yisrael* (the People of Israel) to *Eretz Yisrael* (the Land of Israel) after two thousand years of dispersion throughout the world. Nearly a third of world Jewry are now citizens of the State of Israel and many Diaspora Jews feel a profound and powerful bond with it. Much of the political, financial, and communal energy and resources of Jews worldwide have been aimed at supporting and strengthening its growth and development. We celebrate its existence and pray for its continued welfare.

At the same time, many Jewish communities in the Diaspora are flourishing economically, socially and religiously. While feeling an affinity with the land and State of Israel, Jews, in large number, are proud to be a part of the growth and development of these communities. Israel is, in the eyes of many, a place to visit but not their home. As a result, there are proud British Jews, American Jews, Australian Jews... and Israeli Jews. Where one chooses to settle is considered by many to be a personal matter of little religious significance.

But is it true that where one dwells is a religiously neutral issue? Why, then, did God give us *Eretz Yisrael*? Why have Jews in such great numbers risked their lives to come to Israel? If Israel is the only "holy land", can the decision as to whether to settle there or elsewhere be