



5785 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Parashat Ki Teitzei / פרשת כי-תצא

Welcome Home, Children of Tzion

During World War I, the old *yishuv* in *Eretz Yisrael* experienced tremendous suffering. Under Ottoman rule, Jewish residents faced harassment, extortion, and the constant threat of expulsion, especially European Jews who had immigrated from countries that were now at war with the Ottomans. There were threats to expel any Jew who could not prove and verify that he was born in the Holy Land.

One European Jew, fearing expulsion from the land of his forefathers, contemplated falsely claiming he had been born in Jerusalem. However, as an *erliche yid* who steered clear from falsehood, he was wracked with guilt over lying. He wrote a letter to the famous Rogochover Gaon in Dvinsk, asking if it was permissible to affirm such a falsehood.

The Rogochover's response was characteristically short, sharp, and powerful. The Gaon simply wrote "עיין כתובות דף עה. – see Ketubot 75a." Upon opening to this citation, the Gaon's ruling was clear. The *Gemara Ketubot* cites the verse in *Tehillim* (87:5), "ולציון יאמר איש ואיש ילד בה" – And to Tzion it will be said, "Man after man was born in her." Noting the double reference of איש ואיש, the *Gemara* concludes that there are two different types of children "born" in the holy city of Jerusalem. אחד הנולד בה ואחד המצפה לראותה – one who is born in her, and one who years to see her.

A Jew who left Eastern Europe, yearning to behold Jerusalem's holy stones, truly was 'born' in the Holy City. The Rogochover revealed that this Jew was in fact a natural son of Zion.

A story about the heroic advocacy of Rav Kook *zt'l* parallels this letter of the Rogochover (I gleaned this story from Mishpacha magazine's beautiful tribute to Rav Kook in honor of his *yahrzeit*). In the 1930s, the British had stopped a boat of "illegal" Jewish immigrants from entering Palestine. Rav Kook ardently attempted to persuade the British commissioner to allow them to stay. The officer was surprised, noting that British law explicitly prohibited the entry of foreign immigrants. Rav Kook responded that the law only prohibited entry of new immigrants, but these Jews were in fact returning citizens. These holy souls, passionately yearning for the Holy Land and Tzion, were in fact born in Jerusalem. Amazingly, the British officials demurred and allowed the boat to dock.

Every summer, when watching clips of the fresh wave of *olim* ascending to the Holy Land, I think about the profound truth of this *Gemara Ketubot*. Every sign that prominently announces "Welcome Home!" powerfully declares the spiritual reality that the Rogochover and Rav Kook understood so long ago. These "immigrants" are not immigrants at all. They are the children of *Yerushalayim*, and their desperate yearning to return home has finally been realized.



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Fellow children of *Tzion*, we welcome you with open arms. Despite the difficulties and discomfort of adjusting to a new land and culture, always remember that you are a returning citizen, not an immigrant. The great prophets of old already foretold your return, and your brothers and sisters have been waiting for you.

Welcome home.

