

Rivka Golding has just returned after spending a year studying in Jerusalem's Midreshet Harova, where she participated in a year long seminar on the Israel-Palestine dilemma conducted by the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. What follows is her final paper on the issue of Zionism.

Zionism- A Racist Ideology or a Moral One?

For religious Zionists like myself, the establishment of Israel as a Jewish state represents much more than just a place to find refuge during times of persecution, or a country in which the wandering nation can finally rest her feet. While these are both necessary, Israel is ultimately God answering the promise that he made to Abraham thousands of years ago, that the land of Israel would be an inheritance for his descendants. The Jewish people were exiled again and again but it says in Jeremiah that there will be a final redemption, or more precisely "V'Shavu Banim Le'Gvulam", "And the children (jews) will come back to their borders (the promised land within Israel)." This verse has become the catchphrase for Aliyah, and is something that I truly believe in.

While the Jewish people's historical connection to the land, and our right to reestablish our homeland here, is internationally recognized, that is not what drives my desire to be a part of this country. Rather it is the religious high I am consumed with knowing that this is the land in which my forefathers walked and the land which my ancestors dreamt about for thousands of year. But what is the purpose of having our own country? According to Jewish tradition, the role of the Jewish people is to create a moral standard and a just society that revolves around serving God, not only for us, but to then pave the way for the rest of the world. Having our own sovereign country gives us a framework in which to ultimately reach this perfect reality.

In essence my understanding of a Jewish State is one in which morality reigns supreme, but there are others who use the Jewish people's right to the land as an excuse to discriminate against and abuse the rights of other demographics living in the country. In East Jerusalem, Jewish residents are starting to move into Palestinian neighborhoods and while I think Jews have a right to live throughout Israel, certain standards must be upheld. The history of the Sheikh-Jarrah/ Shimon Hatzaddik neighborhood in Jerusalem is confusing. Purchased in 1876 by the heads of the Sephardic Community Council and the General Council of the Congregation of Israel, the land was recognized as Jewish territory during the Ottoman era. In 1948 the Jewish residents were instructed by the Hagana and British authorities to evacuate their homes due to the fact that the Jordanian legion had entered Eastern Jerusalem, and the violence that would potentially ensue. In 1956 Jordan, in cooperation with UNRWA, housed 28 Palestinian refugee families in these now vacant houses. After the liberation of Jerusalem, the Israeli Custodian General ordered that the property

be released and registered under the Jewish trusts that had originally owned the property and that is in fact what occurred. The Jewish trusts were given legal ownership, but it was agreed that the Palestinian refugees living there would remain the residents of the homes as long as they continued to pay a symbolic rent to the Jews. Since the 1990s these Jewish organizations, have been filing legal petitions to evict the families, usually due to the lack of rent being paid.

After the Palestinians are evicted, they watch as Jews march into their former homes completely taking over the space. Even if according to Israeli law, the land belongs to Jewish organizations I cannot see how as a country in which morality is supposed to guide every decision, this is allowed. Usually when I hear the term "V'Shavu Banim Le'Gvulam" I am elated and overwhelmed with a sense of pride, but seeing the phrase plastered across one of these houses in Sheikh-Jarrah makes me angry. Does a Jewish country mean that is a country *only* for the Jews? I fail to see the morality in that. There is a Jewish right to live in Israel, but not when it comes at the cost of racial cleansing. While ideally Zionism is a noble cause if it becomes merely an excuse to permit discrimination and racism than there may be no point in having a Jewish country at all.

To quote Teddy Kollek, the former mayor of Jerusalem, these settlers, "think they are honoring the past but in fact they are endangering the future." Taking these houses over from the Palestinian residents in this manner, has dire ramifications. Hatred breeds hatred, and ignorance only worsens the current Arab-Israeli conflict. Who can blame a child for hating Israel, when they are living in tents because the state evicted them from their house? The fact that these legal eviction proceedings occur needs to stop. Would Israel allow Palestinians to reclaim the homes in West Jerusalem, in Baka and Katamon, and elsewhere, that they owned prior to 1948? The Palestinians must stop terrorizing Israeli citizens, but peace can only be achieved through tolerance and compromise. Israel is not going anywhere, but neither are the Palestinians.