Rabbi Joseph Radinsky

I've often wondered what makes the country Israel so special. Why is it such a sacred place to so many people? And why of all the spots in the world was it chosen to be the Promised Land? There are certainly other lands with more fertile soil or with more spectacular scenery and with richer mineral deposits, even with more desirable climates. Why should this land of all the lands in the world have come to symbolize the holy, the sacred, the pure in the world? It couldn't have been because in ancient times this was the choicest of all lands. After all, in the ancient world Egypt was much more fertile, Greece much more scenic, and Turkey much richer in mineral deposits. What was it and is it that gives it its special character?

This question especially struck me during a tour Juliette and I took from Kiryat Ovo to the Golan Heights. We passed through most of the different regions of Israel, the Sharon, part of the hills of Shemron, the Jezred Valley, the Beit Sheam Valley, Lake Kinneret, Eastern Gallilee, the Shula, Upper Gallilee, and the Golan Heights. What was it, I thought, that made all these different regions and, in fact, all the other regions we've visited in Israel the Holy Land? It couldn't have been because all the tilled land we saw was green. There are lots of lands that are just as green? And Indiana, Illinois, or Iowa are much lusher agriculturally.

After some consideration, it seemed to me that what makes this land the Holy Land is not the fact that the tilled fields I saw were lush and green, but the fact that the field which Israelis had not yet had a chance to cultivate were yellow and lifeless. This, I believe, is the answer to the secret of why this is the Holy Land. This land is different from most other lands. In most other lands nature, itself, produces lushness, but in Israel this is not so. Everything is here but either not at the right or in the right place. There is a lot of water in the north but not in the south. It rains hard for six months but then not at all for six months. Soils need to be mixed, etc. Everything is here but man has to look, study, and work to make sure that everything is balanced. When he does that

then he is blessed with lushness, rich harvests, and the good life. But if man doesn't balance what is here then the land becomes barren and lifeless.

This, of course, is the secret of the holy, of the pure. Man, too, within himself has everything he needs. He just has to learn how to balance it, how to apply and use all the varying drives, thoughts, emotions, abilities, talents, and responsibilieis that he has within him. If he does this then he, too, will be blessed with the good, the holy, the pure life. If he doesn't then he, like the barren land I saw, will be cursed, filled with hopelessness, despair, and, to all intents and purposes, become lifeless. Are you holy? How's your balance?