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## BILVAVI Q & A ADDITIONS

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# *A Few Recent Q&A*

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## *Is Yomim Noraim 5781 Also A Time To Be Alone With Oneself?]*

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Q

The Rav said that during corona our avodah is to be alone with ourselves. Is this also true for the approaching days of Yomim Noraim? Should we remain quarantined or should we go back to life as usual, to invite our family and guests for meals (while keeping to the precautions of course)?

A

The *avodah* during the corona period, on the external level, is to have “social distancing” from others, keeping away from the space of others, and on the internal level, it is to have your own inner world within. That was the revelation of this period, which is preparing us for the Geulah, may it come speedily, Amen. Therefore, the main direction to take during Yomim Noraim is not to host guests, but for one to build his own inner world. We need to recognize and internalize that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is asking of us to change our direction, to change our thinking. He doesn’t want the social life that weighs upon us so much. He doesn’t want telephones, cellphones, sending e-mails, and all of the daily interactions every second that people have with each other. He wants instead that each person should build his own inner world. The external aspect of this is to keep a social distance from others, but of course this should be done sensibly and not in an insulting way towards others. That is our avodah for the coming year, may it come upon us for good: Internally, for each person to build an inner world for himself, and externally, for one to maintain a distance from the space of others [by not communicating with them so much]. This is something internal and true, and this is what Hashem wants and is begging, from this generation. This particular path, and the period which we have now entered, is the path that is leading towards the illumination of the “Yechidah” part of the soul, and it will be completed with the illumination of Mashiach’s actual arrival.

Q

Which factor determines what kind of actions a person needs to do that will be uniquely tailored to his own soul? Is the source of this the *neshamah*, or does it come from the physical experiences a person has undergone, such as how he grew up, environmental factors, etc.?

A

Any behavior of a person can be influenced either by internal factors or from external factors in one's life. A person may act a certain way because of external factors that shaped his personality, because that is how he grew up, that is what he saw, etc. Or he may be acting based on internal factors. When he is acting in a way that comes from his inside, this is coming from his own *nefesh* (lower soul).

The *nefesh* is rooted in a higher source, the *neshamah* (Divine soul), but the actions mainly come from the area of the soul that is called "*nefesh*," which is the root of a person's power of action. Each person needs to do actions that are in accordance with his unique personality, and accordingly, that is how he can "redeem" his soul in the area of the actions that he does.

### *The Birth Contractions Before Mashiach*

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Q

When corona first began 6 months ago, can it be said that we have entered the 9-month period in which the "Roman exile" will take over the entire world before Mashiach's arrival?

A

The 9 months are not to be literally understood as 9 months, but as a period of "pregnancy" [which will precede the "birth", a metaphor for the coming of Mashiach]. We are already in it.

## *Surviving The End*

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Q

During these times we can actually feel how the end is near. From what I've heard from Rabbonim, we are slowly seeing with our own eyes how this is happening. All of the news I hear is terrifying to me, though I am trying really hard to disconnect from all media, and I am hearing enough from the people I meet and speak with. 5G tracking technology is everywhere, and it's directly in front of my house. And there are other things too. How should I view all of this in the proper way? And what does the Rav recommend I should do? Every time I hear the latest news development, it drains me, whenever I think about the current state of affairs.

A

Repeat to yourself the *emunah peshutah*, the simple belief, that Hashem does everything that and that He will do everything, and that there is no force which has any power in the world except for Him. This is discussed in *sefer Nefesh HaChaim shaar III*. By reviewing these facts, you will be "moving" all the time near the Creator and with the Creator, instead of "moving" all the time with all the human beings on the world. This is the way a true, inner life looks like, for anyone who seeks truth.

## *Gog and Magog & Amalek Today*

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Q

1) Is the "war of Gog and Magog" [the final war in the End of Days] the same thing as Amalek's war against G-d?

A

At the root, the war of God and Magog is a war against G-d, and this branches out into a war against the Jewish people, just as the war of Amalek is. Amalek is the evil “wind” which includes all evil forces in it, and Gog and Magog is the container [earth] which holds it and actualizes it.

Q

2) What is the final rebellion against G-d all about (both the war of Gog and Magog and the war of Amalek)?

A

It is about fighting a war against G-d from all directions.

Q

3) What is “Gog” about and what is “Magog” all about?

A

Same answer as before.

Q

4) Why will Gog and Magog merit burial? Does that mean they will do *teshuvah* before their deaths?

A

Gog and Magog represent the element of earth [on the side of evil], because they are the “container” [for the war of Amalek against G-d], and therefore they will be buried in the earth.

Q

5) Will Amalek be erased before Mashiach comes or after Mashiach comes?

A

I don't know of an explicit source which discusses this. However, the “light of Mashiach” has already begun to wage war against Amalek. It seems that both will take place simultaneously: The destruction of Amalek, and the coming of Mashiach, will probably take place at the same time.

Q

6) The Rav said that from 5760 and onward, the power of “Amalek” began to dominate the world. How exactly do we see this? Is it referring to the dominance of the media?

A

Yes.

Q

7) Amalek is all about “My strength and the might of my hand”, and this arrogance seems to characterize the most powerful countries of the world, such as America, Russia, China, North Korea, and Israel, who all boast of their power. Are all these countries a branch of “Amalek”?



## A

The countries of *chutz l'aretz* (outside Eretz Yisrael) are a branch of Amalek, while Israel is entirely under the exile of the “Erev Rav”.

## Q

8) When America defeated the Germans in World World II, was this a degree of erasing Amalek, since Germany is synonymous with Amalek? If that's the case, then America can't be a branch of Amalek, since it was America defeated “Amalek”. Or perhaps America is still a branch of “Amalek” because they did it for their own interests, and it was all about showing their power, which would still categorize America as “Amalek”?

## A

Amalek is able to be at war within itself [hence different countries of “Amalek” are able to wage war against other countries of “Amalek”]. Part of the “war of Amalek” includes the war of “Esav” against the Jewish people, and the war of “Yishmael” against the Jewish people.

## Q

9) Amalek's main characteristic is *leitzanus*, they mock G-d because they think they are powerful and they represent a life where everything is about “me” and not about submitting to the authority of G-d. Since the world today is centered on pursuing pleasure and self-gratification, would that place all of the nations of the world under the category of Amalek?

## A

At their root, all of the nations are included in Amalek, each nation in a different way.

## *Lockdown In Eretz Yisrael*

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### Q

What should we do about the Health Ministry's lockdown regarding shuls for the next 3 weeks? Should we be *moser nefesh* and come to shul and learn as usual, in big numbers as always, or should we listen to the government's rules?

I am asking this question because I think that at this point, it is clear that corona is no longer an epidemic and it's not a reason to quarantine everyone. That is what even the expert doctors are saying, and according to them, the government is lying grossly. Not only that, but the government has also lied about the numbers of people who have died from the virus, because it's within their jurisdiction to write about anyone who dies, that the person died due to corona. It's clear and simple that they're just trying to tear apart Chareidi society, and that this was their intention from the start. (What was once known to only a few people is now known to most of us, and now *Baruch Hashem* some *Rabbonim* have even spoken about this.)

What does want Hashem from us? That we should be *moser nefesh* and come to daven and learn as usual, even if this will cause us to get the virus? Or should we listen to the government's rules and accept that this is all *gezeirah* from Hashem and we should accept Hashem's will with love...? Maybe it should be like in the previous generations, when everyone knew that certain troubles affecting the Jewish people were all a *gezeirah* from Hashem and they had *mesirus nefesh* for *Yiddishkeit* because they knew it was Hashem's will that they be *moser nefesh* against the government, and to wage war against the government that was seeking to destroy the *ruchniyus* of our children. Or maybe we just need to *daven* to Hashem that He erase this *gezeirah*, and in the meantime do what the wicked government is saying to do....?

I am asking this question specifically because during the first wave of corona the Rav said that it's all the will of Hashem that this is happening and that our *avodah* now is to be alone with oneself and with Hashem directly. Does that also apply now, to the current wave? And if it does, why should it be different than the decrees made in previous generations, where we had to be *moser nefesh* and wage physical war against those who sought to destroy our *ruchniyus*?

# A

We need to be mainly interested in HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and not in the government. The period we are in is a period in which the *Yechidah* point of the soul is shining, and therefore it entails an *avodah* of being individual with oneself. However, this [inner *avodah* of being alone with oneself and with Hashem, through being quarantined] is not allowed to compromise on the parameters of the *halachah*. And in that aspect, this *gezairah* is different from any of the decrees of past generations.

## *Second Wave of Corona In Eretz Yisrael*

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# Q

I have thought a lot about what the Rav has said recently regarding the coronavirus and how it is all a physical manifestation of the depth of the “50<sup>th</sup> Gate of Defilement” which the world is in. The closing of yeshivos has caused untold destruction. Many bochurim who were in yeshiva before are simply roaming the streets now. This pandemic has done more spiritual destruction than physical destruction, by wreaking havoc on people’s souls more than their bodies, on a level that was unprecedented here in Eretz Yisrael. Many bochurim, due to our sins, will not even be returning to yeshiva after this is all over, as expert educators have testified and from what I’ve heard.

Throughout this entire period, all of the emphasis of our leaders has been primarily on our physical safety and on our financial situation, way beyond proportion, and it seems to give the impression that our physical safety is more important than our spiritual situation. Young *yeshiva bochurim* definitely got that message, and they have forgotten any aspirations in having *mesirus nefesh* in Torah, they have forgotten that which they have been taught that it is only learning Torah which protects from danger. When the yeshivos partially opened, with either halfway or a third or a quarter of the amount of people allowed, only a few yeshivos had the *mesirus nefesh* to open up their yeshivos fully. Who knows what tomorrow will bring, and what is the coming Elul going to look like??

This leads me to ask the following questions to the Rav, and perhaps the Rav can light up the darkness for us during this troubling time.

1) Does the Rav agree with these feelings I've written? What is the reason for all the silence of all the leaders of our generation about the damage that has been done to our spiritual situation now? Why is all of their concern all about physical safety and our financial situation?

## A

1) When we consider the external, physical side of the situation right now, it is reminiscent of the period between World War I and World War II. At that time, *Klal Yisrael* had the guidance of the two world leaders of Torah Jewry: Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky and the Chofetz Chaim zt"l. Even with such leadership, though, it is well-known that the situation for *Klal Yisrael* at that point was very complex, and loaded with problems.

If we compare the physical situation of today with the physical situation then, we can see the similarity but we can also see the differences. However, when we consider the internal aspects that are taking place behind today's situation, it is totally different than in previous times. It is much more complex today, and from many angles. Even before this pandemic came, the Torah world and all of Jewry were like dying people, from a spiritual standpoint (and there is a rule in the Gemara that most people who are in the throes of death end up dying). Only someone who was truly *moser nefesh* in his *Yiddishkeit*, in our times, was not part of this category.

The only way to fix the situation until now would have been by taking apart the entire situation of today, collectively and in detail, down to the last detail of all the issues in our generation today, and then to see what could be done about, along with *siyata d'shmaya*, step after step, working on one issue at a time. But this did not happen, and for many years already the situation for Jewry and the Torah world has remained with so many unsolved issues. The current situation [i.e. *bochurim* roaming the streets or simply not returning to yeshiva] is merely a continuation of all the many unresolved issues that have been dredging on for many years already. Prior to the situation of today, anyone who wished to dedicate themselves to the cause of *Klal Yisrael* did whatever they could to help the situation, each according to their own capabilities.

## Q

2) How can we educate our children now that they shouldn't become callous to *ruchniyus* and so that they shouldn't consider their body more important than our spiritual strivings?

A

Speak about Torah truth to them, simply and from purity of heart, and try to act upon your beliefs – on your own level, and according to the level of your family.

Q

3) Should we encourage the Roshei Yeshivos who were *moser nefesh* to open up their yeshivos as usual and without fear of the government, since enough time has passed to prove their move successful and that Torah learning has indeed protected the yeshivos from physical harm?

A

Each situation needs to be weighed separately, about what the parameters of the *halachah* are. After knowing what the *halachic* parameters are, one can then act with *chassidus* (piety) and consider all the factors and see what the appropriate should be, as the *Mesillas Yesharim* teaches with regards to *mishkal hachassidus*. The *halachic* authorities discuss when and where we apply the rule of “Torah protects and saves” from danger. If one does decide to act on the level of *chassidus*, it needs to come from the heart, and it should not be a purely intellectual decision alone. And, even when deciding to open a yeshiva, it must be done within the proper framework of *kedushah* (holiness) and it should not be done with comprises that make *tumah* (media and internet use) available to the yeshiva students, and if this condition is not met, it is clear that the yeshiva will not be protected by their Torah learning. Also, in most cases, the reopening of a *yeshiva* doesn’t depend on the any view – it depends on the actual spiritual level of the students. Our entire focus when it comes to this pandemic should not be about the government or the health ministry – instead, our focus needs to be on HaKadosh Baruch and on doing His will, on what He wants from us.

Q

4) Are the COVID-19 government restrictions really a *gezeiras shmad* (decree of spiritual genocide) on the Torah world, since they are using the pandemic as an excuse to stop all of our Torah learning and all of our davening in *shuls*?

## A

Some of the restrictions make sense, but there are other restrictions which are a matter of speculation, if they make sense or not. Some of the restrictions come from a lack of understanding, and there are also some restrictions which are not being sensitive to the Torah world, due to lack of value for Torah and *ruchniyus* (the spiritual). There are also some restrictions which are being used by the government as a way to have control over religious Jews. It will take wisdom to know what the intention of each detail of the restrictions is, and it will not suffice just to look at the general picture of the situation.

## Q

5) Do we need to listen to the health ministry's rules for physical safety, such as the wearing masks? Or should we not rely on the health ministry's rules at all (as the Rav said right at the beginning of the pandemic)?

## A

First, we must clarify what the *halachah* is. If many experts [doctors] say that certain behaviors must be adapted or avoided, we should be careful with those behaviors on a halachic level, and keep to the guidelines that are protecting our health. We need to be careful in each situation according to the level of severity involved.

## Q

6) We can see that the virus is no longer so dangerous. From all the thousands of people that have gotten the virus, very little of them were in danger. Therefore, if there is a small chance that someone already had the virus, is he endangering other people by not keeping all the safety measures? Would he need to take a blood test and quarantine? Would he need to be concerned if anyone in his family gets a fever or sore throat, etc.?

A

As long as one has a strong reason to suspect that he has the virus, he should go for a test. Even those who weren't endangered from the virus were still affected by the virus, on a financial level, on an emotional level, and on a spiritual level, and there were other repercussions as well. Therefore, a person is indeed damaging others if he has the virus and he goes out into public places.

Q

7) According to the government's laws, one needs to quarantine if he was near someone who was ill with the virus, but this is a self-imposed quarantine which only he would know about. If he does not feel any symptoms, would such a person still need to quarantine himself and not *daven* or learn in a *beis midrash* and keep away from anything that requires him to be near people, etc.?

A

We would need to clarify how much of a risk of danger there is, and accordingly we can then know how to act *halachically*.

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### *Preparing For 5781*

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This coming year [5781], Rosh HaShanah falls out on Shabbos and there is no *shofar*. Does this mean that it will be a more dangerous year for *Klal Yisrael* since we don't have the *shofar* to protect us from the Satan?

A

*Sefer Nachalei Binah* discusses this question and answers that when Rosh HaShanah falls on Shabbos, the Shabbos itself accomplishes the same spiritual effects as the *shofar*. Briefly, the concept is that whatever can be done through the actions of the *shofar* can also be accomplished through

“non-action”, Shabbos. Even more so, Shabbos itself is even more powerful than *shofar*, so there is no danger. (This is because *shofar* corresponds to *binah*, whereas Shabbos corresponds to *chochmah*, which is higher than *binah*). It is true that there have been more tragedies in the years where Rosh HaShanah fell out on Shabbos, and refer to answer #2 below for more about this. Simply speaking, when a person wants to do a mitzvah but he is not able to, it is considered as if he did it, and so too when we can’t hear *shofar* because it’s Shabbos, it is considered as if we heard the *shofar*.

Q

If it is indeed a danger for us when Rosh HaShanah falls out on Shabbos, what can we do to be saved from the troubles?

A

Without tapping into the spiritual illumination of Shabbos, there is a danger, as explained above in answer #1. Therefore, one needs to become attached to the illumination of Shabbos, in which everything is returned to its root above, out of love for Hashem. *Shofar* evokes *yirah* (awe) while Shabbos brings *ahavah* (love), it is a “serenity of love”, because everything is returned to the root, on Shabbos. And on a deeper note, the *shofar* on Shabbos also returns to its root, when the *shofar* isn’t blown because of Shabbos. This has an awesome spiritual effect.

Q

Is there a unique *avodah* we have during a year where Rosh HaShanah falls on Shabbos, since we don’t have the *shofar* to protect us from the Satan?

A

The shofar sound confuses the Satan, whereas Shabbos [and hence when Rosh HaShanah falls out on Shabbos] puts the Satan to rest and nullifies the Satan’s power.

Q



The Rav explained that this year of 5780 was a year where Hashem allowed some of His wrath to be shown, by bringing the coronavirus. Does that mean that each progressing year we will be seeing harsher and harsher displays of Hashem's wrath, *chas v'shalom*? Is Hashem increasingly minimizing His trait of patience, *chas v'shalom*, and do we have a lot to worry of what's in store for us??

## A

If you only look at the external aspect of the period we are in, then yes, it is a difficult time to live through, because we are in the "birth contractions" leading up to Mashiach, and the closer we get to Mashiach, the more painful the birth contractions are. Chazal said that in the period before Mashiach comes, there will be increasing *tzaros* (troubles and difficult situations). But at the inner layer of all of this is the light of Mashiach, which is becoming increasingly stronger with the closer we are getting to the end of the current 6000 year era. Therefore one should connect himself to the illumination of Mashiach by entering into an inner world of simple, earnest belief and unquestioning loyalty to Hashem and all that will happen. This will open up the gates of understanding to a person, and it will also open the gates of the heart, through increased deeper feeling and recognition. This illumination, when accessed, can send blessing into the external dimension and sweeten the pain of the birth contractions, making it an easier period to deal with.

## Q

The Redemption is very close, and we need to be prepared. Rav Dessler said that if one doesn't get spiritually ready for Mashiach and he doesn't work on himself from beforehand, he will have little to gain from Mashiach's arrival, and those who don't fix their souls before Mashiach comes won't be able to soar to new spiritual heights when he comes. Here's the question: We have so much *avodas Hashem* to do!

The details of what we need to fix, both on a general scale and on a personal scale, are endless. We have the *avodah* to more connected with Hashem and to talk to Him and to develop a deeper bond with Him, and as the Rav explains in the "*Bilvavi*" sefarim. We also have the *avodah* to fix our middos, which is a lifelong work. And doing so entails knowing our 4 elements, so that we can know our personal soul and what each of us needs to do work on personally. We also have the *avodah* of *ahavas Yisrael* and we also have the duty to learn Torah and to dedicate ourselves completely with *mesirus nefesh* in our Torah study, and to learn Torah *lishmah*, and we also have the *avodah* now to reach our "individuality" and to

reveal it, and there are so many other important details as well, which we need in our *avodas Hashem*, and it's endless. We can see that quite well from all of the different series that the Rav has given.

“The day is short, and there is a lot of work to be done” – and certainly now, when we are at the end of the *ikveta d'meshicha*, and Mashiach is at the door, and we have so much to fix! What *avodah* do we need to focus on? *Ain Od Milvado*? To recognize our soul better? To speak all the time with Hashem? To learn Torah with *mesirus nefesh*? To fix our character? All of the above? Does Hashem want all of us now to work on every possible detail in *avodas Hashem*, each person at his own level?

## A

Each person, at his own level [should work on whatever he can do]. One should set aside a few minutes to talk to Hashem, simply and earnestly. One should also set aside time, according to his capabilities, for learning Torah until he uses up all his energy. (This is explained in the series on *Darkei HaLimud - Mesirus Nefesh*, “Getting To Know Your Devotion To Torah”). Usually this cannot be done by most people for the entire day, but only for specific times of the day, each person on his own level. But it should also be noted that some people cannot do this [learning until all of their energy is used up], because it only makes them lose the sensitive balance in their soul, when they try to do this.

May you, and all of *Klal Yisrael*, be written and sealed for a good year. [May this be] the year of Redemption, the revelation of the inner light on the lower realm, the revelation of recognizing the Creator completely, the revelation of recognizing His reality, wisdom, traits, and handiwork. And may we receive all of the tools that are necessary to contain all of these revelations completely.

### *To Daven In Shul Or Not This Rosh HaShanah*

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## Q

I live in...and although there is only a small number of people getting the coronavirus now, the numbers are climbing, of course not nearly as much as the first wave, but enough to be concerned about again. Our shul has a tent outside where everyone can maintain social distancing and I am hoping that I can hear shofar there. I can daven at home and someone

will blow shofar for me, but which option is better [shul/tent or davening at home]? Also, is it fine to have over guests [on Rosh HaShanah] with social distancing? And what about having over family and grandchildren?

A

1) This depends on how concerned you are, how calm versus how worried you are [about getting the virus] and it also depends on how much you gain spiritually from davening with a minyan. 2) This depends on how much they [the guests or family members] need it and also on how much you need it, and it also depends on how much *ahavas Yisrael* [genuine love for another Jew] that there is here.

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### *Getting Out of America & Making Aliyah*

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Q

With the recent words of the Rav about corona being an outcome of the “50<sup>th</sup> level of *tumah*”, is it better now to move to Eretz Yisrael if one will still be able to have *parnassah* (livelihood) there and is it for sure better to live in Eretz Yisrael at a time like this when the world is falling apart? In America we are in the aftermath of extremist groups who are wreaking havoc on the country in a short amount of time, and now they want to defund the police. The danger of living here seems imminent. Currently Israel is only allowing in to the country those who have an Israeli passport. But if a person is indeed able to go to Eretz Yisrael now, would it would be wise to quickly move to Eretz Yisrael before the situation here in America becomes more severe?

A

Generally, yes [it makes sense to move to Eretz Yisrael especially at a time like this]. Each specific case, though, needs to be carefully weighed and thought about, before making the move.

## *Making Yeridah – Leaving Eretz Yisrael For Chutz L'Aretz*

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Q

Can the Rav help us decide if we should continue living in Eretz Yisrael or if we should move back to *chutz l'aretz*?

A

Yes.

*L'chatchilah* (ideally) it is certainly better to live in Eretz Yisrael, both from a *halachic* viewpoint, because there are views in the Poskim who maintain that there is a *mitzvah* to live in Eretz Yisrael, and also from a spiritual standpoint, because Eretz Yisrael is a place where one can grow more in *ruchniyus* and *kedushah*.

Sometimes, there is a need to move to *chutz l'aretz*, *mainly* for any of the following reasons:

1) To benefit a *tzibbur*. 2) For *kibud av v'aim* (honoring parents) purposes. 3) If moving to *chutz l'aretz* will help one have more personal growth. 4) For *parnassah* (livelihood) purposes. 5) For medical purposes – either physical health or mental/emotional health. 6) For *chinuch* purposes (educating one's children). 7) For *shalom bayis* (marital peace) purposes.

Practically speaking, clarify with your wife, if you can, about the pros and cons of leaving Eretz Yisrael. Then you can better figure out how to ease your difficulties [with living in Eretz Yisrael]. Along with this, you should try to slowly internalize the gains and qualities of living in Eretz Yisrael, but do this sensibly and with wisdom.

If possible, decide that you will stay in Eretz Yisrael for some more time, like another year or at least another half a year. After your 'deadline' comes, re-evaluate your situation again. The very fact that you are giving yourself a deadline sometime later this year, where you will re-think your situation again, is enough to ease your difficulties [of living here].

Make sure to give your wife a true feeling that you genuinely want what's best for her, and let her know that if there is indeed a pressing need to move to *chutz l'aretz* that you are prepared to move, if need be it.

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<http://question.bilvavi.net/ask-english/>

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