

This Land is My Land

A Breslov Perspective on the Holy Land

Essay #6—Parshat Pinchas 5761

The interesting thing about Parshat Pinchas is that it always comes out during the Three Weeks (except in very rare occasions). Thus the two are quite inter-related and the important thing is to learn a current events lesson from this proximity.

The Three Weeks commemorates the final weeks of the Second Temple era. It begins on 17 Tamuz when the walls of Jerusalem were breached and culminates on Tisha b'Av, the 9th of Av, the day the Temple was destroyed. It began the diaspora, this long exile of nearly 2,000 years, during which we have been distanced from the Temple, from the Holy Land, and from living in the “normal” sense of a secure existence. Since then each millennium, each century, each decade and even each year and day has its fair share of *tzoros*—of suffering and oppression, the suppression of our yearning for God and His Torah and the obstruction of our return to the Holy Land. And yet (*Leviticus 26:42*), “I will remember My covenant with Jacob, My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; and I will remember the Land.” Thus, during the duration of the exile, despite our being distant from the Land, we never really were that far from it. For we were in God’s thoughts at all times, as was the Holy Land!

We can see this in the parshah of Pinchas, which is read at the beginning of the Three Weeks. Reb Noson points out that the parshah contains the passage of the distribution of the Holy Land among the Tribes, Tzelophchad’s daughters and their request for a portion of the Holy Land as well as containing the laws of the inheritance of the Land. It also contains Moshe’s request for a leader for the Jews upon his passing, as well as the passages of the sacrifices—daily, weekly, monthly and festival. And, it is well known that these sacrifices can only be brought in the Temple. Why the proximity of these sections of Torah in the reading of Pinchas, at the time of the Three Weeks when the Temple was destroyed and the Jews exiled?

This is precisely the reason for its proximity. For God has never wanted us to remain distant from the Land. He wants us to return to Him and to the Land. We thus find that specifically in the three Torah readings of the Three Weeks the Holy Land is discussed in great detail. Even in our darkest moments, we must remain strong with faith that we will return to our Land, with peace and prosperity for all.

We see this in the laws of inheritance. Rare is the estate which passes from one generation to the next without someone contesting the will. The Torah states the laws of inheritance, firstly by stating clearly the final ruling of who inherits what. This leads (at least eventually) to peace and prosperity among the heirs. But more importantly, the inheritance laws encourage us to realize that the Land is ours, and that it is our heritage and our right, to receive the Land as God’s gift to us.

But, as the Torah tells us, as soon as Moshe gave over the laws of inheritance, he was told he must pass away. Moshe immediately requested from God that He appoint a leader for the Jews. “One who will go

before them... that the Jews not be a leaderless flock” (*Numbers 27:17*). For we can only receive the Land when we “follow the leader,” the tzaddik who teaches us the value of the Land and why it is so crucial that we have it. Moshe himself, as taught in the Zohar, must remain outside the Holy Land for his generation never made it to the Holy Land. When the Resurrection takes place Moshe must be there for his people, his generation, to make sure that they too will be resurrected and will enter the Land. By appointing Joshua, his disciple, Moshe made sure that his teachings would live on. Joshua thus became the leader, and succeeded in transmitting Moshe’s message, that the Land is ours—to inherit, to own—for he conquered the Land and distributed it to the Tribes.

But we can only gain this Land and the knowledge thereof, if we follow Moshe’s teachings. For as we have seen in the previous essay, it is Moshe’s power of the mouth, his prayer, which is the real power behind the leader. As Rashi points out (*Numbers 27:17*), a leader is one who puts his neck on the line for his people and does not shirk his responsibilities. (Rashi cites three examples: Moshe, Joshua and King David.) In our contemporary societies, we have succeeded in deluding ourselves that our democratically elected officials are our “leaders.” Instead, truth be told, some of their ideas indicate that they have reached the summit of “followship,” “leading” their constituents according to public opinion polls rather than by truthful ideas and ideals, which are politically incorrect.

This is what Moshe was telling us by appointing Joshua: Each person in the flock is different, with widely diverse views. You must be able to stand opposite each one and yet do the right thing. This is leadership. This is leadership which can bring the Jews to their rightful inheritance. To prosperity. To peace. It is only a **true** leader who can bring the Jews back to their Land and to rebuild the Temple on the Temple Mount, something which no manipulator of public opinion polls can do.

This leadership must be one that follows Moshe’s example and draws upon his strength. For no leader can stand up to a nation, or the media, unless he has well placed faith in God and relies on Him to recall His promise to us and to always remember us and the Holy Land. The manifestation of that faith is displayed through prayer, through “Moshe’s mouth,” through Moshe’s strength and power. For we find that Moshe, as leader, stood up even to God, demanding forgiveness and good for his people. Thus, by not allowing ourselves the illusion of a strong, democratically elected “follower,” but rather always seeking true leadership through prayer to God, we have every chance of following our leaders to the Holy Land, to see the rebuilding of the Temple and the Ingathering of the Exiles.

May we merit to see the Coming of Mashiach, speedily, so that Tisha b’Av is transformed from the day of mourning to the day of rejoicing, Amen.

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