

This Land is My Land

A Breslov Perspective on the Holy Land

Essay #8—Parshat Maasei 5761

Dateline: Oklahoma City, June 2001 -- Timothy McVeigh, convicted of mass murder in the Oklahoma City bombing, was sentenced to death. Pleas of “Oy vey, McVeigh,” resonated from leaders around the world, including the Pope, pleading that his life to be spared. Nevertheless, the unrepentant McVeigh was put to death.

Amazing! McVeigh calculated for others to die a horrible death—and succeeded. He killed 168 people, wounded hundreds more, and ruined the lives of countless others, leaving behind orphans, widows, widowers, bereaved parents and grandparents, brothers, sisters, and friends, etc. He further caused emotional and financial damage beyond the scope of his intended murderous plans. Yet, world leaders called for—compassion?! But this is not an anomaly. I saw recently a cartoon of Arafat who was saying: “McVeigh made a big mistake by placing a bomb in the midwest. Had he placed it in the Mideast, he would have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize!” Is it no wonder that all the world leaders who pleaded “Oy vey McVeigh” are the same as those who plead for “compassion and restraint” by Israel when their enemies kill them?!

What is compassion? And, when are we to invoke it? The last lesson Rebbe Nachman gave during his lifetime, on Rosh Hashanah 1810, discusses where compassion comes from, how it manifests in the good and the wicked. In his own special way the Rebbe weaves a most beautiful tapestry that covers many subjects. The following is a very brief summary of that lesson, one of the longest and most intricate in *Likutey Moharan*.

Giving moral rebuke is a very great thing; nonetheless, not everyone is suited to give reproof. This is because reproof should be meant to bring inspiration to the rebuked. However, in most cases, the reproof offered tends to denigrate the individual. This type of rebuke wafts the bad odor of those souls at whom his reproof is directed which consequently weakens his soul. The only person who is really suited to give rebuke is one who can inspire the souls who hear his rebuke. It must be “compassionate reproof.” Through “nourishment of the body”—craving for food—“nourishment of the soul” is weakened and fear of God is marred. Fear of God is the primary nourishment of the soul. Rebuke must strengthen the soul for it must lead to recognition and fear of God.

A person’s mind and understanding protect him from immorality. There are three distinct mental faculties in a person, Chakhmah, Binah and Daat [which correspond to the cerebrum, the cerebellum and the medulla oblongata]. Each one of these faculties can act as a partition between the person and immoral desire. Every person must know that anytime sexual thoughts overtake him, God forbid, he must set up the partitions of his mind to deflect that desire. The importance of this cannot be understated, for the essence of prayer consists of supplications and pleas for compassion, and compassion is dependent upon a clear, refined intellect.

On the other hand, a blemish of the mind, due to immoral thoughts, allows the Other Side [i.e., evil] to control the mind, to control one's compassion and to misdirect it. When that happens, the Other Side takes that compassion and transforms it into cruelty. That is, he shows compassion for the wicked, strengthening their position, while good people suffer [e.g., criminals are free to roam the streets while law-abiding citizens live in fear]. In turn the person's intellect shrinks further and he is again attacked with immoral thoughts, which damages the compassion further.

However, there is a tzaddik who is morally upright. When he prays, his pleas are so powerful that they can combat the evil forces and force them to give back everything they have taken control of [e.g., the wicked's freedom to harm others]. Consequently, God's honor is increased, because His compassion is revealed. Then, people who were distant from Him can draw close to Him. In turn, prophecy becomes prevalent, people's intellect is refined and purified which leads to perfected faith.

With prophecy and faith prevalent, Divine Providence is revealed and miracles become commonplace. All this is conceptually the Holy Land, the Land of Miracles, for the Land of Israel represents the power of Creation, Divine Providence, which transcends the natural order [much as the Act of Creation transcends the natural order of "After Creation"]. Then, the world will run according to the "rules" of the Holy Land—miraculously!
(*Likutey Moharan II*, Lesson #8)

In this week's Torah reading (*Numbers* 34:1-13), God describes the boundaries of the Holy Land to us in great detail. Reb Noson writes that this was to instill in us the value of the Land, how important each and every inch of it is, for God Himself detailed its parameters. As Rashi observes, "It was to delineate the area within which the many mitzvot tied to the Land must be performed," for possession of the Land has the influence to lead us to the performance of mitzvot which, naturally, always finds favor in God's eyes. The cycle continues, for the more favor we find in God's eyes, the greater the degree of Divine Providence we experience, for "God's eyes are upon the Land..." (*Deuteronomy* 11:12).

Thus, the importance of true compassion is that it leads to a revelation of Divine Providence and the sanctity of the Holy Land, where day in and day out miracle upon miracle takes place. And, true compassion is not as difficult to attain as it may seem. We arouse compassion when instead of berating and degrading our fellow man we speak positively and arouse the dormant good in him. We can place a bit more effort into our prayers so that they protect us from immorality; we can hone our intellects to continually develop our innate moral values. And what follows is prophecy; not only the spirit of prophecy, but, more importantly, the *fulfillment* of that prophecy. A quick look in the books of the Prophets will show us the wonderful life we have to look forward to, if we would but claim our Land, in the prescribed manner that reveals its beauty and wonders, i.e., the miracles of life. Amen.

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