

This Land is My Land

A Breslov Perspective on the Holy Land

Essay #14—Parshat Ki Teitze 5761

First, a very brief history lesson:

Arabs hijack passenger airliners (Swissair, TWA, etc.), attack civilian airports in Athens, Rome and Vienna, and blow up buildings (the World Trade Center in New York City).

And before continuing this series, a “news” update:

(August, 2001, Jerusalem Highway and in Gaza.) Saturday night, Arabs kill two people and seriously wound a third, who subsequently dies as a result. Several Israeli soldiers are killed, several others wounded, in an unprovoked attack near Gaza.

(August 2001, Durban, South Africa.) Distraught over the plight caused by human suffering and due to their deep concern for human rights, at the UN Conference for Human Rights, the Arabs are organizing a “Zionism equals racism” campaign.

Which Pol Pot is calling the kettle black?

We now return to our series, “This Land is My Land.”

Genesis 11-17.

Avraham (Avram, Abraham) grows up in a house of idolatry. Our Sages tell of how Avraham found idolatry worthless, “How can you worship something that you’ve carved out in your own mind or with your own hands?” (This is applicable in our day and age too! I know of a certain Foreign Minister who worships peace to the extent that he is prepared to sacrifice all the citizens of his country for it—in addition to a “piece of a noble prize”). So Avraham began to search for a God, a Real God, One Who has Real Power, One Who can hear one’s prayers—and **can** answer them. So Avraham searched for and found God. God, for His part, wanted to make sure Avraham really wanted Him. So He tested him. He tested him ten times! (*Avot* 5). Among the first tests were being cast alive into a huge inferno (while still living in Ur Kasdim); having to leave his elderly father; “Go to the land that I will show you” (*Genesis* 12:1).

But which land? None was specified. It was to be “The land that I will show you,” when you get there, if you get there, if you can figure out which one it is! So Avraham went searching for that land. As he passed through each land, he not only checked the physical land, but its guardian angel, the one who administers the nation and its land. (Each of the seventy nations has its own angel in Heaven who administers to its nation’s needs and who pleads its cause before the Heavenly Tribunal.) Avraham was knowledgeable about all the administering angels and knew their powers and limitations. He did not choose any of the first lands he examined. He continued traveling until he came to the Holy Land. He began examining the Land. Try as he might, he could not determine which angel was its guardian, to which nation it belonged!

Avraham continued looking deeper into the Land and its corresponding spiritual power and realized that it contained the Even Shetiyah (Foundation Stone; see [Essay #13](#)). he realized that this land was the center of the world—from the Foundation Stone the entire world was brought forth. He further realized that the heavenly power administering this land was Unlimited, for the land is under the direct Divine Providence of God Himself, with no administering angel. He realized that this land was totally different from all others (*Zohar I, 78a*). And this is where he settled.

God had promised Avram that, “I will make you a great nation” when he lived in the Land. Yet Avram could not have children (*Rashi, Genesis 15:5*). Only when God changed Avram’s name to Avraham, by adding the letter *heh*, was Avraham able to bear a child.

In Genesis 16, it states clearly that Avram was 86 years old when Yishmael was born. (but wasn’t Avram barren?). In Genesis 17 we find, “Avram was 99 years old; God appeared to him and said, ‘I am God, go before Me and be perfect. I will make a covenant between Me and you...You shall be the father of nations...you shall be called Avraham...I will sustain My covenant between Me and you and your descendents after you...to you and your offspring I will give the Land where you are living...The whole land of Kanaan shall be your eternal heritage...My covenant is the circumcision...Sarai will be called Sarah...she will bear you a son’...Avraham rejoiced but said ‘Can he who is nearly 100 years bear a child? Can Sarah who is 90 bear a child?’ Avraham pleaded before God, ‘Let Yishmael live before You!’ God replied, ‘But Sarah will bear you a son. Name him Yitzchak (Isaac)...and I heard you with regard to Yishmael, I will bless him, make him fruitful, increasing his numbers very much...But I will keep My covenant with Yitzchak.’”

Here is the crux of the problems we face today. Clearly, the Promised Land is associated with our keeping the Covenant of the circumcision. Clearly, this Covenant was given to Avraham and was to be passed on to his son, Yitzchak. Only to them, and not to any others. Not to Yishmael. And not all of Yitzchak’s seed either, for Esav, too, though born of Yitzchak and Rivkah, is not considered to be Yitzchak’s seed (*Sanhedrin 59b*). Kabbalistically, the covenant and the Holy Land are very closely related, because the covenant corresponds to Yesod while the Holy Land represents the level below it, Malkhut. Thus, these two are basically inseparable—as long as we guard the covenant we can inherit the Land. If, God forbid, we mess with the Covenant, then having broken our promise, the Promised Land doesn’t have to be promised to us either.

What the Covenant means is a life of morality, as explained many times in Rebbe Nachman’s teachings. We have touched upon it earlier in these essays and will discuss it further as part of our focus upon the Land in the continuation of these essays. Right now we should connect the significance of the Holy Land to the Covenant and to Elul, so that we focus upon the meaning of the Land of Israel today, in this time, in Elul, and why, despite the Torah’s clear definition of whose Land it is, we have problems with our “Yishmael” neighbors.

God’s promise (*Genesis 17:7-8*) states, “I will keep My covenant between Me and you and your descendents, throughout their generations, an eternal Covenant; I will be God to you and your seed...I will give the Land...” In Hebrew, “V’hakimoti et briti Lihiyot Lekha Leilokim U’I’zarakha Acharekha...V’natati Lekha Et Eretz megurekha...” (Please bear in mind that depending upon the vowels, the letter *aleph* appears as an *a* or an *e*. while the letter *vav* will appear either as a *u* or a *v*.) Reb Noson writes that if we examine the first letters of the words in these two verses, we find two *alephs*, two *vavs* and four *lameds*. These letters make up the word **ELUL**, twice. Reb Noson continues to list about

10 additional verses where **ELUL** is an acrostic. All the verses make a clear reference to the Covenant and/or to the Holy Land.

The focus of Reb Noson's teaching is that the three concepts, the Covenant, Elul and the Holy Land are intricately bound together. Elul, as we know it, is a month of contemplation, a month of self-searching and introspection, to recognize and rectify what we've done wrong, while at the same time committing ourselves to the path of self-improvement. If we are willing to practice the "intentions of Elul," if we are ready to accept our shortfalls and look for the means to better our ways, then we are already on the "path of return." This path, aside from our own personal improvement and return to a better living and way of life, also includes our "return" as a nation to the Holy Land. As mentioned, this depends upon the Covenant, our morals, if we conduct ourselves in an upright manner, act respectfully to others, act with morality in financial and sexual behavior. These are the major ingredients we need for "return."

The problem is, anything that is good and worthwhile does not come easy. Like Avraham, we have to seek and search for our "Holy Land." We need the introspection of "Elul," of return. And we have to understand what it is that is holding us back from our return. And to know this is by returning to the biblical account of the birth of Yishmael from a "barren" Avraham and the story of what happened when Avraham performed the Covenant. (To be continued.)

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