

This Land is My Land

A Breslov Perspective on the Holy Land

Essay #15—Parshat Ki Teitze (2) 5761

In the middle of the upheaval of the Napoleonic wars in 1809, Rebbe Nachman told one of his more famous stories, *The Exchanged Children* (*Rabbi Nachman's Stories*, #11). Briefly, the story is about a queen and her maidservant who gave birth at the same time. The midwife exchanges the babies, placing the prince with the maid and the maid's son was given to the queen. She was curious to see how the children would fare out of their "natural" environment. The true prince, though raised in a servant's household, was drawn by nature to royal ways. The servant's son, on the other hand, despite being raised in a royal household, was by nature drawn to less-refined mannerisms and characteristics. Nonetheless, growing up in the king's palace, he was raised in a royal manner and forced to behave accordingly.

The midwife eventually let the secret out, but it was impossible to do anything to change the situation (it was before DNA testing). People began to gossip which irked the false prince. Fearful of a rebellion, the false prince forced the true prince to flee from the kingdom. And, whenever the false prince heard of someone who would speak negatively about him, he would cruelly quash the rumors.

The story continues with the true prince fleeing and taking to brothels and getting drunk. A long time passes until he takes stock of his life and begins to do the right thing. One day he becomes lost in a forest and comes upon another lost man. When the true prince finds some bread, he is reluctant to share it with his newfound friend because who could say that he would find another supply of food. The other man, not having eaten for several days, was so hungry that he sold himself as a servant to the true prince in order to have some food. Eventually, they come upon someone who directs them to a certain kingdom where they will meet their true destinies. At the kingdom, the true prince is found worthy of becoming king of the land. The servant whom he bought for a morsel of bread turns out to be the false prince who had cruelly banished him.

Just prior to telling the story, Rebbe Nachman spoke of Napoleon, who was born a commoner yet became an emperor. "Who knows what sort of soul he has? It is possible it was exchanged, because there is a "Chamber of Exchanges" where souls are sometimes changed."

Reb Noson discusses this story, in *Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaShachar* 3. He speaks of the Heikhalei HaTemurot, (the Chambers of Exchanges) and explains the battle for supremacy between the body and soul. Basically, with the creation of this physical world, the soul was meant to climb the ladders of royalty and maintain its majestic aura with service of God. The body was created to serve the soul and help it attain those lofty levels. Yet, in the material world, i.e., if someone enters the Chamber of Exchanges, the body becomes supreme while the soul is relegated to an inferior position. Not only that, but the soul ends up fleeing its place because of the dangers; yet these dangers, the additional exiles lead to a further degradation of the soul. Time passes, before the person begins to awake from his spiritual slumber and evil characteristics and is able to begin to return to his rightful position, as royalty, as a portion of God from Above. (This discourse formed the basis for our publication *Anatomy of the Soul*, which explains the spiritual powers within each person.)

Reb Noson continues his discourse with a running commentary on Jewish history. Each time the Jews reached a certain level of spirituality, they were goaded or misdirected into the "Chambers of Exchanges" and not only lost their spiritual attainments, but plunged into the morass of materialism. They received the Torah, they made a golden calf; they conquered the Land and built a Temple only to engage in idolatry and to be exiled to Babylon. They returned to the Land and due to misdirected hatred were forced again into exile. Each time they reached a certain plateau, they would succumb. But we must remain strong, for the true prince will, and must, leave behind his immorality and his attraction to the physical, in order to return to his rightful place, the House of Royalty, to God's Palace, to the Holy Land and to the Temple. Reb Noson also sees this "Chamber of Exchanges" as the battle for ascendancy between the Jews and the nations. Between Yitzchak and Yishmael. Between Yaakov and Esav. Which almost brings us to the birth of Yishmael. Almost. But first we have to know what Avraham and Sarah are all about.

As explained previously, God created the world so that we should recognize Him and serve Him. Adam and the succeeding generations didn't succeed in this and were wiped out in the Flood. When Avraham was born, he began seeking God. The world was created for such a person. Thus Scripture states, "These are the generations of the Heavens and earth 'b'hibaram" (on the day they were created; *Genesis* 2:4). *b'HiBaRAM* is the same letters as *ABRaHaM*, for in Avraham's merit the world was created (*Bereishis Rabbah* 12:9). He was born in the year 1948 from Creation. By the time the second millennia was completed, Avraham was 52 years old. It was then that he began drawing people close to God as is written, "The souls they made in Charan" (*Genesis* 12:5; *Avodah Zarah* 9a). As Rashi explains, "Avram converted the men, Sarai converted the women." Through Avraham, people were brought to knowledge of God, an awareness that God exists and is ever-present in our lives.

Bear in mind that Avraham's name at that time, when he was teaching others about God, was Avram. Rebbe Nachman teaches that, in the main, to have children is dependent upon the letter *heh*. This *heh* (which has the numerical value of five) refers to Daat, for there are five concepts in Daat (knowledge) that separate God's Daat from human Daat (i.e., five types of knowledge which the human mind cannot ever attain; see *Likutey Moharan* I, Lesson 53). The Rebbe explains that "Adam knew his wife" (*Genesis* 4:1), means that only with Daat can a person procreate. (The procreation mentioned in Torah as the first mitzvah, is not the same procreation referred to here by the Rebbe. What Rebbe Nachman always taught is that knowledge of God is considered Daat. One who has that Daat is considered a human being. One who rejects Daat of God is compared to an animal in human form. For he can never qualify for the purpose of the goal of Creation - as a human being who serves God. Thus, "procreation" in Rebbe Nachman's teachings refers to the transmission of knowledge of God from generation to generation; see *Likutey Moharan* II, 7.)

To continue: How can a person attain Daat in order to give birth? By drawing people close to God. His students question him and he must provide answers. He sharpens his intellect and grows in knowledge, attaining the highest level of Daat possible for him (*Likutey Moharan* I, 53). Thus, Avram began drawing people close to God. He grew in Daat until he merited to the *heh* of Daat, which was added to his name, changing it to Avraham. Though he was then 99 years old, he was able to have children, offspring who would continue bringing his Daat and awareness of God into the world. Having this Daat is what enables a person to leave behind a legacy in this world. Avraham needed that "heh," for, as we see in the Bible, none of those "souls who he made in Charan," remained devoted to God. It fell upon Yitzchak to continue his father's lifework.

We are now ready to discuss Yishmael's birth and his claim to the Land.

(To be continued.)

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