

This Land is My Land

A Breslov Perspective on the Holy Land

Essay #19—Parshat Ki Tavo (3) 5761

"Who is a Tzaddik?" the Zohar asks. "One who guards the Covenant" (*Zohar* I:59b). Rebbe Nachman's teachings make constant reference to this concept of the Covenant and its implication for the here and now. But what is the Covenant? "This is My covenant between Me and you...you must circumcise every male child" (*Genesis* 17:10). God tells Avraham that He is making a covenant with him and all his offspring after him. This covenant is the sign that God will be true to the Jewish people and that the Jewish people will be true to God. Which covenant is this? "You shall circumcise your male child." Rebbe Nachman teaches further: All Jews are called Tzaddikim in that they are circumcised (*Likutey Moharan* I, 23:end). The merit of the *brit milah* is very great; it is enough to earn a Jew the distinction of holiness and the accolade Tzaddik.

We should recall that Yishmael was circumcised and his guardian angel pleaded his case for 400 years. The merit of an imperfectly performed milah was enough for Yishmael to be rewarded with a connection to the Holy Land for several millennia (see [Essay #17](#)). If this is the reward for milah when performed not for the sake of the mitzvah, then how much greater is the reward given to those who perform the milah for the sake of doing God's will!

The important thing to remember is that the Covenant is the pact which God made with the Jews. Were any mortal king to make a covenant with a people, would they not honor and cherish it and do their utmost to fulfill it at all times? Certainly, they would at least make every effort to safeguard it from being violated. Now, God, the King of kings, made a pact, this eternal Covenant, with the Jewish people. Could it be even supposed that just by undergoing the *brit milah* in infancy, we should feel ourselves absolved of our part of the pact, exempt from further guarding the Covenant and all it stands for? If a mortal king were to expect his subjects to honor and fulfill our covenant with him, how much more so does God expect the Jewish people to feel obligated to honor, fulfill and guard their eternal Covenant with Him?

But what constitutes guarding the Covenant? What else is actually required of a person to heed this pact? Where in Torah is it mentioned that the Covenant must be guarded beyond what is actually written? The specific sign of God's Covenant with the Jewish people, the organ where the *brit milah* is performed, has been entrusted with the remarkable ability to initiate new life. But procreation can only be accomplished through a union. The Talmud teaches that there are three partners in a child: the father contributes the "white" parts of the body (bones, nails, etc.); the mother contributes the "red" parts (skin, flesh, etc.); and God breathes life into the child... (*Nidah* 31a). The three partners must function together. How does this happen?

The Talmud refers to marriage as *KiDuSHin*, from the Hebrew *KoDeSH* (holy). This is to teach us that marriage, the union between husband and wife, should be an act of holiness. Then the Divine Presence, the third partner, resides between them (*cf. Sotah* 17a). Sexual union, when performed in holiness, shows honor and respect to the God-granted powers of procreation. Furthermore, by guarding the sanctity of marriage, they prove themselves worthy of having the *heh* of *Daat* to transmit the *Daat* and knowledge

of God to future generations (see [Essay #15](#)). Thus, living within the framework of the Torah and adhering to its laws, ensures the guarding of the sign of the Covenant and hence the safekeeping of the Covenant itself. Rebbe Nachman teaches: As long as one marries according to Torah law and keeps his marriage within Torah boundaries, he is reckoned as guarding the Covenant (*Likutey Moharan* I, 11:7).

Thus, guarding the *brit* — observing the Torah laws pertaining to guarding the sign of the Covenant — enables even the simplest Jew to attain the level of Tzaddik. Most likely, the average person will be skeptical of this. Is this all that's required to become a Tzaddik? The answer, Rebbe Nachman tells us, is yes. There are 613 mitzvot in the Torah. The numerical value of *brit* is 612; of Torah, 611. This teaches us that guarding the *brit* is equivalent to all the other 612 mitzvot and is inclusive of all the other mitzvot. Any attempt to guard the Covenant, to live morally, will propel us into Torah and holiness. (For greater detail, see *Crossing the Narrow Bridge*, Chapter 16; *Anatomy of the Soul*, Section 9; published by Breslov Research Institute.)

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What connection does guarding the covenant and leading a moral life have with "My Land," the Holy Land? Biblically, we see they are bound by the juxtaposition of the verses in Genesis 17. But a deeper insight is necessary to understand this idea. The Kabbalah speaks of Ten Sefirot (lit. "luminaries") which are also understood as different types of spiritual energy. The Ten Sefirot begin with Keter (the "crown") at the top and are as follows: Keter, Chakhmah and Binah (sometimes Daat is mentioned in place of the Keter), Chesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netzach, Hod, Yesod and Malkhut. (Those unfamiliar with these terms are directed to *Innerspace*, by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, published by Moznaim.) We will on the last two, Yesod and Malkhut.

The idea of the sefirot is that God sends down bounty to this world through the supernal energies, through the sefirot. All blessing, all bounty, all spiritual energy, is channeled from the highest levels and gathers in Yesod, from where it is transferred to Malkhut. As explained in the holy writings, Malkhut ("Kingship") is the energy which interacts in this world. By accepting God's Malkhut, we can receive His blessing, His energy. And, by accepting God's Malkhut, we can serve Him and direct our energy towards Him. Thus, Malkhut is the interface between our corporeal world and God.

Yesod is the connecting point where all the spiritual energy gathers prior to being transferred to Malkhut. Thus there is an important interaction which takes place — or should take place — between Yesod and Malkhut. Kabbalistically, Yesod corresponds to the *brit*, the level of the tzaddik, the righteous man. Malkhut corresponds to its mate. A unification between these two brings about "gestation and birth" — the deliverance of bounty and blessing to this world. Additionally, Malkhut corresponds to the Holy Land (see [Essay #3](#)).

Thus, by guarding the covenant, one keeps his Yesod intact. He possesses the energy and blessing to unite with Malkhut, with the Holy Land. And, if the Holy Land is seen as such — i.e., a holy land — then it is prepared and ready to receive the blessing designated for it. This is because the level of tzaddik, of Yesod, of *brit*, of a moral life, is capable of transferring blessing, knowledge and recognition of God, and Malkhut is ready to receive it. However, if there is a blemish in the *brit*, or if the mate is unable to receive that blessing, then all that bounty, channeled from the Highest of Sources, from God, is wasted. It is delivered to the Other Side, to the unworthy. God's Malkhut remains concealed and the difficulties in finding Him and serving Him seem insurmountable.

So there are several things to consider when thinking about current events in the Holy Land.

1. Yishmael has a legitimate claim (otherwise God would have "grabbed the earth and shaken the wicked from it"; see [Essay #17](#)).
2. Yishmael's claim only includes *living* in the Land. It does not at all allow for **oppressing** Jews.
3. If he does oppress the Jews, it is either because he feels he is avenging his grandmother Hagar (very unlikely), or is avenging someone else whom he has a grudge against (the rest of the world). In either case, his behavior and oppression of others is not at all justifiable.
4. Yishmael's claim is valid only to the degree that he had some semblance of fulfilling the *milah*.
5. That being the case, the Jews have a stronger, more justifiable claim to the Land.
6. What if the covenant wasn't upheld? Wouldn't that cause a blemish of righteousness, of the concept of tzaddik, and of who is worthy to be in the Land?
7. Wouldn't such a blemish of the *brit* cause the significance of the Holy Land to be severely diminished in the eyes of its beholders?
8. Is it no wonder then that if immorality is allowed to flourish, the sanctity of the Land would be concealed and subsequently lose its meaning to us?

And isn't this what has happened? There's more to living in the Holy Land than just living there. We've got our work cut out for us; to reveal the sanctity of the Land, to allow its beauty and prominence to ascend to its proper level. When we begin to restore our values then we will automatically witness the restoration of the Land to its prominence in our hearts, minds and goals. Then we will begin to see others in a totally different light.

That light is the concept of reward and punishment, how God has compassion and how that compassion is awesome, extended and limitless. Yet, despite His compassion, He still deals justifiably with each and every person and thus Rosh Hashanah, Judgment Day, is so crucial to us as individuals and as a nation. Sometimes we can understand a bit of His justice, other times we have no inkling of it at all. But, we can, and God willing will, get a good look at it in our next essay, which will itself be broken into several sections because of the complexity of the subject matter. (After all, it's not such a simple thing to have Yishmael shooting at us every day in our home. There's got to be some complicated reason for it!)

(To be continued.)

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