

# This Land is My Land

## A Breslov Perspective on the Holy Land

### Essay #23—Parshat Nitzavim (2) 5761

"You are *nitzavim* (standing) here today before God...." In the previous Torah passages, in Ki Tavo, we read about the curses that would visit the Jews if they sinned. Hearing so many curses, the Jews said to Moshe, "How is it possible to remain standing with such curses?" Moshe answered, "You are standing here today...." "You have sinned many times before God, yet you are standing here today. The curses are that which give you the strength to stand despite your hardships" (Rashi). And so it is today, we are still standing, before God, upon our Land, despite two thousand years of exile, torture, pogroms, Crusades, Inquisitions, Holocausts, etc. And, despite Yishmael's continuous call to "throw us into the sea."

In summation of the last 10 essays about our claim and Yishmael's claim to the Land, about Rosh Hashanah, about reward and punishment, about God's system of justice, and about immorality and the circumcision, we still have to tie it together, which we hope will be done now, satisfactorily to everyone. (I can hope, can't I?).

As Reb Noson writes about *Tikun HaMishpat*, rectifying Justice so that it stands absolutely correct, is the job of Mashiach. He'll have a hard time of it — because things don't always seem so straight — but he'll be capable of doing it. When that happens, everything will work out fine for everyone involved, for Jew, Arab and everyone else. Simply put, those who are deserving will be rewarded, those who are undeserving will be punished and won't be around to complain about it! And those who are so-so, will be rectified and eventually find themselves deserving too. Let's backtrack a little bit.

Hillel the Elder once saw a skull floating upon the water. He said, "Because you drowned others, you were drowned. But, in the end, those who drowned you, will also drown" (*Avot* 2:6). The ARI writes that Hillel saw the skull of Pharaoh who drowned the Jewish children, therefore his punishment, "measure for measure," was to be drowned. But who had the right to drown Pharaoh? Only God. Therefore, "In the end, those who drowned you will also drown." Or, as mentioned in the previous essay, who asked the Babylonians to torture the Jews. Wasn't it enough just to exile them? The "liberties" taken by those who have no right to execute judgment are a perversion of *mishpat*, which must be rectified. When we translate what we've learned about *mishpat* into contemporary terms relating to us, the Holy Land, Yishmael's claim to it and so on, the following picture emerges.

A battle royal is now taking place between the Arabs and the Jews over supremacy in the Land. Each claims title of the Land by virtue of being Avraham's descendent, for God promised Avraham the Land when he performed the milah. (In case we question this "battle" please bear in mind that the nations' guardian angels argue this scene out before the Heavenly Tribunal. What takes place down here on earth is a manifestation of that Heavenly war.) Yishmael's claim for ownership has validity though he has not performed the mitzvah correctly because, "God does not withhold the reward of any creature," even a "wild creature." Therefore, Yishmael had the merit to bond with the Holy Land while it was empty of its rightful inhabitants. But he has no right to hold onto property that is not his, especially as its rightful inhabitants are, thank God, returning in droves.

Secondly, Yishmael certainly has no right to harm or torture anyone because of his claim. He had permission to rule the Holy Land when he did because of his *milah*, and he was given authority over the Jews because of the oppression of Hagar by Sarah and Avraham's reluctance to prevent it. However, this never has, and never will, give him the right to abuse anyone. Yet, his behavior, inhuman as it is—as befits a "wild man"—is a perversion of justice which awaits rectification. If we wonder why Yishmael is allowed to persist in his behavior, after so much unwarranted, cynical and bloodthirsty bloodshed, we recall that God does not dispatch a nation until its measure is full. So if Yishmael's merit of *milah* is still valid, we've got to wait a little bit more. It won't last forever since it was not performed correctly. And it can't last much longer because he obviously keeps filling his measure with every frenzied attack, every slander reported, every bullet shot.

The problem is, what about the poor Jewish fellow who is the recipient of Yishmael's free will, the Yishmael who tries to help out God's Attribute of Justice by visiting it upon the Jews at every opportunity? Well, he falls into anyone of several categories of those who suffer: due to his own sins (either from this or previous incarnations), or as a bystander when a different guilty person "bites the bullet." But a "funny" thing happens on the way to the forum between Yishmael and the Jews. Each time an Arab attacks a Jew, he goes beyond the parameters of what he is supposed to be doing and increases the wrath against himself and his nation. But didn't the person who was hurt deserve what he received? Well, yes, to put it simply (and it's simply put because there really is a lot more behind this). At any rate, maybe he did deserve it. But, as in *Chad Gadya*, who asked the Arab to butt in? Thus, each attack hastens the rectification of *mishpat*, because God must now look into the Arab to increase his amount of punishable measure, while the Jew who suffered increases his own and his nations' forgiveness, having suffered at that time. Eventually, the measures are filled, this one for reward and the other for punishment.

Of course there's a natural fear of "what's really going to happen?" All said and done, there are over 100,000,000 Arabs who claim the Land and actively declare that we'll not have any rest until they get the Land. So what are our real chances for peace? The answer is to recall that God rules the world. Thus, when the time comes, the guilty will fall, while those with merit will be able to claim what's theirs, without opposition.

Those skeptical that Yishmael can fall overnight, we point out the recent demise of the USSR. A mighty country, with nuclear facilities, the largest army in the world, tanks, artillery, power and might, fell, literally, overnight. Because, when the time comes for God's salvation, it comes, and is with us. As the prophet said, "It is coming...will come to pass" (*Ezekiel 39:8*), for God's Word, once uttered, is as if it has already come to pass.

This doesn't mean we are clean of sin, that we don't have to set our own house in order. We—not I, at least—cannot walk around with a chip on our shoulders saying we are clean as can be. If that were the case Mashiach would have come long ago. We've got a lot to do on our own to rectify our *mishpat*, to do the correct thing before God. To build, to love, to do good, to help another, to make the sacrifices that atone for sin. (We don't have to die "on Kiddush Hashem" [Sanctifying God's Name], as did the Ten Martyrs. As Breslover Chassidim are wont to say, "It's harder to **live** a Kiddush Hashem, than to die on Kiddush Hashem!")

And this is where Rosh Hashanah comes into play. It is a Day of Judgment. And we read on Rosh Hashanah the passage from Genesis 21, in which Yishmael was deemed righteous and allowed to live.

Why? Because he was judged at that time as being righteous, despite his future of evil, death and torture of others. Before he was banished from Avraham's house God said, "And the maidservant's son will I make into a [great] nation, because he is your seed." This is read on Rosh Hashanah, and has a tremendous impact Above (see *Tzaddik* #462).

The lesson to be learned from this is that we must strive to become righteous, for then we are judged in the scale of righteousness. Our enemies have their lives; let them live them as they wish. But we must live like the seed of Avraham and Yitzchak should. For if about Yishmael (the wild man) it is written that he will be a great nation, how much more so does this apply to the Jewish Nation?! But it depends upon our morality, in sexual matters, in financial matters and in our relationships to others. By guarding the Covenant of Avraham, by behaving as a prince rather than as an exchanged child and by spreading Godliness, we display the qualities of our ancestors, Avraham and Sarah.

By doing so, we merit to reveal the Land, its holiness, its rightful owners and the Sanctity of Israel. It calls for focusing upon the right thing in our prayers on Rosh Hashanah, because this enables us to access the concepts of God's Justice. We can see His righteousness in allowing the wicked to flourish, which protects the tzaddik and the Jewish Nation. As the Rebbe teaches, by accepting God's justice, the patriarchal merit is revealed (*Likutey Moharan* I, Lesson 55). This, in turn, reveals the sanctity of the Holy Land, which causes the downfall of our enemies and the ascent of the Kingdom of Holiness. This is all alluded to in the paragraph which is part of the blessing, *HaMelekh HaKadosh* (the Holy King, the third blessing of the Amidah) on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. "U'vekhein tein kavod... And so: God! give glory to Your Nation, praise to those who fear You, and great hope to those who seek You; an open mouth to those who beseech You. Joy to Your Land, and happiness to Your City, and a sprouting salvation to Your servant [King] David, and a setting forth of light for the son of David, Your Mashiach, speedily in our days." (Amen.)

May it be His will that we merit to properly repent, thereby gaining the merit to see the coming of Mashiach, the instituting of genuine justice in the world and the forgiveness of all sin, this Rosh Hashanah and forever. Amen.

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I apologize for the length of "this" essay (which took 11 essays to complete) and hope you'll forgive my garrulous manner. But I felt it important to put the current conflict into both a historical and contemporary perspective, yet keep it focused on its spiritual components in order to find God even in such a deep concealment. If there are any questions I'll be happy to reply - time permitting. Over the next few weeks we'll be in Uman for Rosh Hashanah, God willing, and afterwards it's Yom Kippur and Sukkot and then I start my winter fundraising trips/lecture tours until the end of December. And, in case there wasn't enough pressure, my daughter just got engaged and a wedding is planned for the end of this November. Since I don't think I'll have much time to think about new essays during this period (we are still working on our Chumash Project and Volume 7 of *Likutey Moharan* among other projects) it'll actually be easier to reply to questions than to think of new ones! Please specify if you'd like your question addressed as an essay for everyone or if you'd like it answered personally.

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