

This Land is My Land

A Breslov Perspective on the Holy Land

Essay #28—Parshat Bereishis 5762

Saying goodbye to the holidays — and hello to the coming cold and dreary winter months — is never an easy task. We should therefore take a moment to reflect on what has actually gone by. There's been Elul, Rosh Hashanah, the Ten Days of Repentance, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, the sukah, the Lulav/Etrog, Hoshana Rabbah, Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. Logically, we should feel a bit of sadness: God has handed us such wonderful treasures on a silver calendar, but who knows if we really made the most of them? My father-in-law, Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Rosenfeld ז"ל (*zikhrono livrakhah*, of blessed memory), was always bothered by the passing of the festivals. He once asked his rabbi, Rabbi Avraham Sternhartz ז"ל, what could be done to alleviate this unease? The answer? "Never say that the festival has past. Say that it has now come!" For until now, I was not able to credit my spiritual register with these festivals. Now that they've come and I did whatever little or much I did to observe them, now I know that God has credited me with the observance of the holy days — His mitzvot! May we merit observing as many mitzvot as we can.

Which brings us to this week's Torah reading and its connection to the Land. We have already seen in [Essay #1](#) how the very beginning of the Torah reflects the sanctity of the Holy Land and that it is — by the decree of God the Creator — our Land, and that no one else in the world has any legal or illegal claim to it. It was a gift from God to us, from the Land's Rightful Owner to His Own Nation. However, as we have also seen, we did (at least) a few things that were quite uncalled for and the Owner, rightfully and after many warnings, exiled us from His property for a spell of time — now nearly 2,000 years — until we set ourselves right again. As we can also see, He has allowed us to begin our return to the Land. Those of us who are fortunate to lift our eyebrows even a bit, can see many miracles which sustain us today in the Land, which allow us to settle, develop, plant and nurture the Land. But why are we not ALL returning to the Land? What is keeping ALL of us back?

In this week's Torah reading Adam sinned. He ate from the Tree of Knowledge and was banished from the Garden of Eden. He had one mitzvah, not to eat from the Tree, and he blew it. He was banished. We, who were granted 613 mitzvot to observe, didn't stand up to our test either. Ours' was (is) a greater test—we have many mitzvot to observe—and we blew it too. So we were banished from our "earthly Garden," from our Land. Reb Noson writes that Adam's sin produced a flaw in the sanctity and intellect of the Land (*Likutey Halakhot, Kibud Av v'Eim 2:4*).

What was the essence of Adam's sin? Arrogance. It was his desire to be overly intellectual, to be godlike, too smart for his own good (see Rashi, *Genesis 3:5*). Reb Noson takes this a step further and writes that because of his arrogance, Adam became an atheist, for arrogance leads to heresy. In addition, Reb Noson explains, all sins ultimately stem from arrogance (see *Likutey Halakhot, Netilat Yadayim Shacharit 3:5*). Adam's failure to observe his mitzvah led to his banishment from the Garden of Eden. The converse is also true. Performance of mitzvot has the power to bring one back to the Garden.

In considering some of the contemporary parlance used in the battle over the Holy Land, such as,

"exercise restraint," "do not allow the usurpers to remain and grant autonomy," etc., we are forced to say that these statements can only have been made by those who deny that God created the world and gave His Land to His nation. Thus, the main way to overcome these heresies (which are closely connected to lunacy) is to strengthen our faith. And, of course, to learn a little bit about humility and acting humbly, before God.

We just went through Days of Awe and Days of Repentance. We've just experienced Days of Joy as well as Days of Humbleness, sitting in the rickety booth and pondering our security. It's designed to instill humility after all. If we truly wish to draw the essence of the Holy Land back into our lives and draw ourselves back into the Holy Land, we've got to incorporate that humility into our daily lives.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that we must never say it is because of the many nations that we cannot return to our Land (*Likutey Moharan* I, 11:8). It is not because of the many nations telling us what to do, how to act with compassion to our neighbors while they continually engineer death and destruction for our "benefit." It is not the decrees and sanctions of the United Nations that prevents us from taking full control of our Land (and our lives for that matter). It is not the aspirations of the Palestinians for statehood (no other nation would even let them breathe freely) that has aroused such intense interest in the Middle East, inspiring other nations to benevolently provide OUR real estate for their unreal state. No! They have nothing to do with it at all.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that the reason we are not able to return to our Land is due to our own haughtiness. This applies especially to those who act humbly, but do so only because they know their arrogance will cause them to be spurned and rejected. Therefore, they appear humble and "bow their heads" to others in gestures of humility.

Reb Noson points to an amazing Talmudic statement. What is the meaning of the verse, "Who is the wise man to understand this; that God has spoken to him and told him, 'Why was the Land lost [to you]...?' And God answered, 'Because they left My Torah — they have not obeyed My voice or walked in its path' (*Jeremiah* 9:11-12)? Aren't "not obeying" and "not walking in its path" the same? The question was put to the sages and the prophets, but they could not answer it. God Himself had to answer the question. The Talmud explains, that the Jews of that generation lost their right to live in their Land because they did not recite the blessings over the Torah (*Nedarim* 81a). This was why the wise men and prophets couldn't answer the question. If the exile was because of their lack of Torah study then the reason was obvious. But the exile was not due to a lack of Torah study. Which terrible sin caused the exile? Refusal to recite the blessings over the Torah!

In discussing this teaching, Reb Noson writes: It appears that not reciting the blessing over the Torah is a more severe sin than idolatry, adultery and murder, and other capital sins! How can that be? Reb Noson answers that these blessings emphasize God's having chosen us as His nation. This is a *segulah* (a suprarational phenomenon), that God should choose one nation out of all the nations of the world to be His (see *Likutey Moharan* I, 21:9). But He did. When we thank God "Who has chosen us from all other nations," we proudly acknowledge our unique status. Our Torah study and fulfillment of mitzvot then take on an entirely different and special meaning. By not reciting these blessings, by not declaring our special status, we lose our faith in our unique position as a chosen nation, we lose sight of our true and refined noble goals. We tend to become like the nations which surround us (*Likutey Halakhot, Birkhot HaShachar* 5:7; *ibid.*, *Birkhot HaTorah* 1).

And then, well, what the heck? "Why does the Land belong to me?" "Why should the Land belong to

me?" "Why not help those who shoot at me, who kill and massacre innocent people?" "Why am I any different from them?" (As noted above, this borders on lunacy). So we give it up. Then once we've sacrificed our uniqueness, why not sacrifice everything else dear to us? In short, Reb Noson points out that the main reason we lost the Holy Land is due to our loss of Jewish pride. Pride in ourselves as a nation, pride in our accomplishments, pride in our history, pride in our contributions to the welfare of all mankind. And nobody can even come close to doing as good a job as we have. But because of the loss of pride, we lost our Land.

But didn't we just say that Rebbe Nachman teaches the main reason for our inability to return to the Land is haughtiness and arrogance? So, which is it? Do we have Jewish pride or must we divest ourselves of every last bit? The answer is that Jewish pride represents the positive feelings we experience about our Jewishness. This is of paramount importance to our attitudes when acknowledging truth, experiencing faith and simply serving God with joy. This pride acts as an elixir of life to propel one towards greater spiritual levels. In short, Jewish pride is the battery which charges our energy levels to grow and develop, to remain steadfast against all the overwhelming odds that seem to close in us.

Haughtiness, on the other hand, is a feeling of superiority, which, as the Rebbe explains, resembles idolatry. Thus, to "conquer" the Land and attain what is truly ours, we must develop our Jewish pride, while at the same time, we must be made extremely careful to not make any claims like "the Land is mine because I am better than the other, because I deserve it, etc." Then we not only lose the Land, but are prevented from returning to it.

When Adam was banished from the Garden, God placed the "revolving sword" to prevent his return. But after Adam showed contrition for his sin, he could have overcome the sword and returned to his rightful place. However, because he lacked the necessary pride to face up to his error and rectify it he remained banished, in exile. But we don't have to. We can—and must—be contrite, and be remorseful for our errors, and be humble. Then, we can—and WILL—return to the Land. Amen.

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