

This Land is My Land

A Breslov Perspective on the Holy Land

Essay #45—Parshat Shemot 5762

"And these are the names of the children of Yaakov who descended to Egypt...Reuven, Shimon, Levi, Yehudah. Yissakhar, Zevulun and Binyamin. Dan, Naftali, Gad, Asher...Yosef was in Egypt...And Yosef and all his brothers, and that entire generation passed on....And a new king arose who did not know Yosef...."

Though they had to descend into exile, they never forgot who they were. They were princes; they were the children of Yaakov; they were those who established the Jewish Nation. Each was a leader in his own right, men of stature, men of worth. And they were led by Yosef, who established himself, his morality, his decency and honesty in Egypt, a land famous for everything opposed to good. Yosef's morality, decency and honesty were such that they became available in Egypt.

When Yosef and his brothers died, they left behind a leaderless nation. Once leaderless, they were subjected to the wiles of Pharaoh, the new king, the one who didn't know Yosef, the one who refused to recognize true leadership, worthy men, honest and caring people. As a result, the Jewish Nation fell into bondage and suffered. They fell to the lowest depths of impurity and servitude, to the 49th level. Just a drop more and they would have been struck there forever.

Rebbe Nachman teaches:

We find that when the Jewish People were on a very low level, when they were trapped in the Forty-Nine Gates of Impurity in Egypt, they required a great master, a great and awesome teacher and leader—namely Moshe Rabbeinu. For the more spiritually immature and distant from God one is, the more one needs a great teacher. This teacher has to be an educator of such quality that he is able to imbue, elucidate and enclothe an insight of the perception of Godliness, to one as immature and distant as he. For the sicker the patient, the greater and more expert a doctor he requires. Therefore, a person should not say, "It is enough for me to have as my guide a distinguished person, even if he is not so outstanding." On the contrary; to the degree the person knows inside himself how very distant he is from God and from perceptions of Godliness, he must seek a very, very great healer for his soul, indeed, the greatest one (*Likutey Moharan I, 30:2*).

This is why God, in His Mercy, sent us Moshe to redeem us from Egypt. At the beginning of his mission Moshe promised us, by way of God's promise to him, that we would leave the exile of Egypt and ascend to the Holy Land (*Exodus 3:8*). This would have happened right away, had the Jews not ruined things by fooling around with idolatry, a golden calf and the spies, etc. It cost them 40 years in the desert, all as a direct result of their rebelling against the very great leader who redeemed them. Eventually the promise was fulfilled and they entered the Holy Land.

Redemption and ascent to the Holy Land await us, all of us, all Jews, again. But, not surprisingly we've

messed up somewhere along the way and find ourselves mired in mud—or, more exactly, mudslinging, insider fighting and outsider pressures. We now find ourselves requiring a very, very, very great teacher, maybe even greater than Moshe. We need Mashiach himself.

Interestingly, the way Moshe became our leader was that he saw two Jews fighting. He intervened, only to hear them abuse him and report him to Pharaoh's gestapo for stopping the fight (*Exodus 2*)! After all, what kind of leader tries to bring peace to his people? What kind of leader cares that his people are getting hurt and yet does nothing to stop it? What kind of leader puts his neck on the line for his people? Moshe cared and did and was nearly killed for it.

In order for us to return to the Holy Land we must realize that internally we are not well. We have problems within ourselves and our communities that require major surgery. This major surgery requires major healers; major, major healers, very great tzaddikim who can teach us to engage in perceptions of Godliness and not pettiness and quarrels. We need a Moshe, we need the Mashiach.

Alas, our pettiness and quarrels have led us astray, and we even fail to realize the quality of leader we need. We have descended to seeking mediocrity. Instead of demanding greatness we elect—on our own volition!—"leaders" who spend their time quarrelling with others, instead of devoting their every minute to resolving the problems of the people who elected them. Imagine! Instead of seeking, searching and choosing very, very great leaders, we instead choose and elect "leaders" who are mediocre, very, very mediocre. "They cannot control themselves, let alone lead others" (cf. *Likutey Moharan I*, 61:2). What chance do we have to ever be redeemed, if this is the quality of leader that we choose for ourselves? Not very encouraging, just like the political picture and nightmare scenarios we are currently facing.

So, Rebbe Nachman's message for the week of Shemot, the week when the bondage begins, is to try to nip it in the bud. The Rebbe explains that exile isn't so much being in a foreign state as it is being in a foreign state of mind, namely, allowing surrounding cultures to invade and pervade our minds, influencing us to think as they do (see *Likutey Moharan I*, 36:1). "There are Arabs in the Holy Land. What makes you think they are ever going to leave?" Well, if we think like those who want us to think like that, correct. We're in exile, we have no control over ourselves, over our lives, over anything and we've got to accept the situation as is.

We come to a different conclusion, however, if we think with perceptions of Godliness. "Fact: there is an omnipotent God. Fact: the Land is ours and ours alone. Therefore, we do NOT have to accept the current situation." We need a very, very great teacher, comparable to Moshe, to illumine to our dark, exiled state of mind, to change our thinking.

We need to start now by recognizing that we are ill and suffering. We need to seek and search for the most qualified "doctor," the most qualified leader. Let's forget about relying upon these elected officials who say they represent us. At *parshah's* end, we find that Pharaoh ordered the Jews not only to build, slave labor style, his cities, but even to obtain on their own the necessary building materials. When the Jews confronted him and told him that it was an impossible task, Pharaoh countered, "They are slouchers...they cry, saying, 'Let us serve God.' Increase their workload, that they may labor in it, and let them not be swayed with falsehood!" (*Exodus 5:8-9*). Reb Noson writes: "You! Reader of the Bible! See! Look! Understand how far-reaching falsehood extends to exchange truth with falsehood. Pharaoh, who enslaved an entire nation claims the truth for himself And the poor Israelites, who were forced into the most burdensome slavery, were accused of falsehood, as if only Pharaoh seeks the truth, the benefit of his enslaved subjects" (*Likutey Halakhot, Ribit 5:30*)!

Such is the attitude of false leaders, of evil leaders, of worthless leaders, of self-appointed, self-serving leaders. Let's forget about those "leaders." Let us begin our search for the leader who CAN help us, who can imbibe us with perceptions of Godliness and who can LEAD his people. For then he will bring us up out of our various exiles and lead us to our home, the Holy Land. Amen.

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