

This Land is My Land

A Breslov Perspective on the Holy Land

Essay # 52—Parshat Tetzaveh, Parshat Zakhor 5762

"V'atah tetzaveh — And you shall take pure olive oil for the Menorah." Pure olive oil is considered that which is squeezed first from the olives and not that which is squeezed from the olive in the second press. Only this type of oil is permitted to be used for the Menorah (*Menachot* 86b; Rashi).

"Remember what Amalek did to you..." (*Deuteronomy* 25:17).

When speaking of the Jews' violation of their covenant with God, the prophet Jeremiah said, "God has called you [the Nation of Israel] a green olive tree, fair with beautiful fruits" (*Jeremiah* 11:16). Why at that specific moment, a time when the Jews weren't observing the Torah, did God refer to them specifically as an olive tree? Throughout Scripture we find the Jews being compared to other, more beautiful trees.

The Midrash provides the answer:

Olives are grown mainly for oil. When the olive is still on the tree, it is marked when it is ready to produce oil. It is taken off the tree, beaten and taken to the press where it is pressed to produce oil; then it is pressed again under heavier stones to produce even more oil. So too, the Jews. The nations beat them, press them, bind them and lead them from place to place; the Jews finally repent and God saves them (*Shemot Rabbah* 36:1).

Another similarity: All liquids blend with one another; no liquid blends with oil. It always floats to the top. So too, the Jews cannot assimilate with other nations. Thus, if the Jews follow God's will, they will always be above the nations (*ibid.*).

Another similarity: No Jew ever suffered when the Temple stood. If a person sinned, he entered the Temple a sinner, but he emerged a tzaddik, after offering his sacrifices. What greater joy can there be for a person to be cleaned. The Temple thus symbolizes light, the presence of God. Just as oil illumines, so too, the Temple illumines the entire world. This is why our ancestors are compared to the olive: They illumined the entire world with our faith (*ibid.*).

An interesting Midrash. Encouraging, but a bit scary too. We, as a nation, can bring light to all of mankind and even to the animal kingdom. We can bask in peace and harmony. But, we are also told that we are going to have to take a "few knocks" and be "pressed" before we can get to that level. It's the "few knocks" which we are getting now. We must be aware of these "knocks" in preparation for Parshat Zakhor, in order to remember Amalek and his ilk, and in preparation for next week's Purim victory.

Dateline, USA, February, 2002: President Bush has declared several nations the Amalek of today, calling them "the Axis of Evil." They include pre-present-day Afghanistan (for the Taliban seem to have been defeated), Iraq, Iran and North Korea. These nations support terrorism and are producing weapons of

mass destruction. As the "Axis of Evil," these nations represent a threat to the American Way of Life, as well as a threat to humanity. Therefore, they must be subdued. The USA has resumed aerial attacks against the Afghans hiding in the mountains.

The USA ought to consider itself fortunate since they are blessed with a president who can actually recognize evil, at least to some degree.

Dateline, Southern Israel and Gaza strip, February, 2002. Arabs attack on several fronts, in cities and villages in the south of Israel. They shoot machine guns and fire rockets, in order to destroy the lives of innocent civilians. In reply, the Israel Air Force bombs Palestinian Authority buildings in Gaza. Several Palestinians are hurt. Palestinians blame Hamas terrorists, while claiming their own innocence! President Bush says he is concerned over the escalation of violence and condemns the attacks on the Palestinians.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that Amalek represents philosophy and sophistry. These are people who lack the ability to think straight, to "call a spade, a spade." They view everything as needing investigation in order to discover its "true, inner meaning." At the same time, they disconnect themselves from any reality of a situation. These people are distant from God; they have no relationship with Him nor do they seek any type of relationship with Him. They destroy faith; they counter truth and simply ruin people's ability to attain perfection and to reach real goals (*Likutey Moharan II*, Lesson #19).

How can we really attain faith in times like this? Our backs are to the wall, we are battered from all sides and taking a "few knocks" on the chin from everyone. As the Midrash taught, it is our faith that can, and will, illumine the entire world. Yet, the nations never give us a chance. A little light dawns upon the USA, and its people begin, after September 11, to realize that there is good and evil in the world. Their president opens his eyes to what is perceived as evil. However, if a Jew should see *his* enemy for what he really is, Amalek stands ready to hold the Jew in check, not allowing the any breathing space.

Thus, Arab terrorists, by the president's own admission, have been attacking innocent civilians for nearly two consecutive years (not counting the continuous barbaric attacks of previous years). Yet he has reservations about the Jewish Nation protecting itself from the wholesale slaughter the Arabs are trying to inflict upon them. It would be interesting to learn what evil deeds are necessary to "qualify" for admission in the Axis of Evil. But are we, as Jews, to be pressed by the nations?!

In reality it is no concern of ours — at all. We've been beaten and we've been pressed; we've been to hell and back any number of times. Yet we're still here. We have remained. Even though assimilation hangs over us like a sword, we're still here. We have not lost our identity. Furthermore, despite Amalek's intentions for us, we somehow come out on top, although it's a bit harrowing to have to travel there through the Shadow of the Valley of Death (cf. *Psalms 23*) again.

Yet, all this is because we are a "green olive tree, fair with beautiful fruits." Fact is, the Midrash is teaching, that unless we are pressed, we somehow never give forth our true fruits. So we actually have to look at the "pressing and squeezing" of the nations as being very beneficial to us. God specifically compares us to the olive. It is specifically the nations who "squeeze that olive" which causes us to give forth our beautiful fruits.

In *Likutey Moharan* (I, Lesson #17), Rebbe Nachman speaks of these pressings and pressures placed upon us by the nations. He calls it, "the good which is suppressed under the nations' control." This refers to the mitzvot and good deeds we could have been engaged in during the time the nations oppressed us

and diverted us from that good. All those mitzvot and all that good is under the control of the nations.

When we give charity, we create a tranquil atmosphere (for giving to others creates an atmosphere of friendship between benefactor and beneficiary). With tranquility, an atmosphere of peace is created. This allows truth to spread and to arouse many people who are very distant from God to serve Him. In fact, the Rebbe continues, the tranquil atmosphere is so beneficial, it allows even non-Jews to hear of the true faith. They convert to Judaism, and bring with them the good that was hitherto suppressed — under their control! — returning that good to the Jewish Nation. This is the meaning of the verses, "Many of the provincials converted to Judaism...His [Mordekhai's] fame went out to all the provinces" (*Esther* 8:17, 9:4). That is, because Mordekhai engaged in charitable deeds his words of truth spread out to each of the 127 provinces of King Achashveirosh. Those words convinced many of the provincials to convert to Judaism.

We see from this, that had we not sinned, we wouldn't be pressed at all. However, in all those years, we should admit to committing at least a few errors. Despite our being pressed, we have still maintained our faith, a mini-Temple of light in our dark world. Actually, being pressed may perhaps be why we've maintained our faith. We continue to seek truth and goodness, recognizing Amalek/evil for what it really is, never accepting it, never submitting to it.

Therefore, we know that the axis of evil is beneficial to us, for it creates a stronger bond between us and God. So we don't pay much attention to what a president, prime minister or foreign minister says. We instead listen to the message of truth. In the end, the nations who have oppressed us — and who still oppress us — will return to us all the good they have taken: the innocent lives, the stolen property, the time and effort we were forced to give to their nonsensical claims and murderous intentions. The Holy Temple will be built. Jerusalem will once again be the center of the universe and the light of true faith will illumine the entire world.

This ties in with this week's parshah, Tetzaveh, which speaks about the incense sacrifice, as well as the Altar upon which it was offered (*Exodus* 30). The ARI explains that the incense had the power to penetrate even the deepest realms of impurity and elevate the sparks of holiness from there. But, woe to the unworthy who encountered the influence of the incense offering, for they met death (*Shaar HaKavannot*; see also Rashi, *Numbers* 17:13). The Altar itself has a similar power to bring into the fold the entitled and the worthy, while at the same time rejecting the unentitled and the unworthy. (There are other concepts in Judaism that have this feature, such as the *tekheilet* [blue thread] of the tzitzit.) Those of us who by birthright are entitled to the Holy Land will merit it, hopefully with no more "knocks." Those who are unworthy and those who are unentitled, will also merit to their end through it.

So in the spirit of Purim, hang in there you olive branches! You'll see some of the most beautiful fruits the world has ever produced. Amen.

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