

This Land is My Land

A Breslov Perspective on the Holy Land

Essay #56—Parshat Vayikra 5762

At the end of the Book of Exodus, we find the completion of the building of the Mishkan, the Sanctuary. The Book of Leviticus begins with, "*Vayikra el Moshe* - He [God] called to Moshe from the Tent of Meeting...." With the Sanctuary built, a physical form was ready to receive the revelation of Godliness as well as allow for man to have God speak to him, and he to God. Thus, "*Vayikra el Moshe....*" Rashi explains that the manner in which God called Moshe was a sign of the love and esteem He had for Moshe! Interestingly, in the Torah scroll, one finds that the letter Aleph of Vayikra is written very small. It is known as *aleph ze'ira*, the "little aleph." When young children first begin to study Torah, it is customary for them to begin with the Book of Leviticus, because the sacrifices in the Mishkan must be brought in purity. As the Midrash teaches, "Let the pure be occupied with the pure."

So it is with us. We too must build our own "sanctuary" and prepare ourselves to be a vehicle for Godliness. We too must work on ourselves to attain some purity of soul. Then we will be worthy to "hear" God, His "daily hints and messages" which He uses to call to us through the many facets of Creation. In addition, we will be able to "correspond" with Him, through all our thoughts, words and deeds, which are available to us - each in his own way - through everything with which we relate to in our daily lives (see *Likutey Moharan* I, 54:2). And the more we seek God, the more He will reveal Himself; the greater degree of revelation will cause us to seek Him more, ad infinitum, until the Sanctity of the Holy Land is revealed to all. Then, there will no longer be any bloodshed and war, suffering or despair. For then Godliness will become manifest for every single person in every way possible.

However, it's not as easy as it sounds. Rebbe Nachman continually exhorts us to start anew, to begin each day with a fresh attitude, looking for the good in each day, as well as the good in ourselves and in each other. As important as it is to start each day anew, it is equally important - or even more important - to get a head start in life, to begin when young. It is certainly much easier to grow up with God than to "all of a sudden" be exposed to Him at a later age, because that requires a total change of mind set. Circumstances don't always lend themselves for such a drastic change in lifestyle.

But what's a person to do if he/she didn't have the chance or opportunity to "meet" God when young? Rebbe Nachman thus once said, "Old is not good. It is not good to be old. One must renew and reinvigorate one's self each day, each time. This way, one never "grows old." (*Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom* #51).

Still, it is very important to begin when young. Herein lies the crux of the problem we face about the Holy Land today. Jewish agencies that keep track of such statistics state that only between 10%–15% of American Jews have visited Israel. Amazing, huh? Some 5,000,000 Jews in America and only 10-15% have made the effort to visit the Holy Land!

For 2,000 years we've longed and prayed for our return to the Holy Land. Many thousands have made the incredible self-sacrifice, both financially and physically, to make a pilgrimage to the Land of Israel to

have the merit to walk even just a little bit in the Holy Land. Now that it is so easily accessible, most people don't even care enough to travel there in relative comfort. Even worse, there are approximately 1,000,000(!) Israelis who were born in Israel but who opted for living in other countries. That's 20% of the population of Israel!

Imagine some 50,000,000 Americans opting to move abroad in the course of some 25 years (when most of the Israeli emigration began). Imagine some 200,000,000 Chinese seeking to live elsewhere in the course of a few years. In the annals of history this has never before happened, anywhere. Why us? Even worse, contrast this with the Palestinians who claim the Holy Land as theirs and who are clamoring - at least in the press - for "the right of return." What is there left for us to say?

To try to understand this, let's look at one of Rebbe Nachman's most famous lessons, "Azamra!" (*Likutey Moharan* I, 282). The gist of the lesson is that one must look favorably at everybody, including - perhaps especially - himself. Finding good in ourselves and in others makes "music;" it brings one to joy and happiness, dispelling depression and lethargy. Then one can sing and praise God and pray to Him. One who seeks and manages to always find the good in others, merits to be the prayer leader, for he can collect the good and make the necessary melodies of life. Rebbe Nachman taught:

Know, "a person must judge everyone favorably" (*Avot* 1:6). Even someone who is completely wicked, it is necessary to search and find in him some modicum of good; that in that little bit he is not wicked. By finding in him a modicum of good and judging him favorably, one genuinely elevates him to the scale of merit and can bring him to repent...Likewise, a person must find some good point within himself. A person must take care to be happy always and to keep very far away from depression...It may be that when he begins examining himself, he thinks that he possesses no good whatsoever and is filled with sin, and that as a result the Evil One wants to push him into depression and sadness, God forbid. Even so, it is forbidden to fall on account of this. Rather, he must search until he finds in himself some little bit of good. For how is it possible that throughout his life he never once did some mitzvah or good deed?!...He must go on searching until he finds in himself yet another good thing. And although this good thing too is mixed with much impurity, still, he must extract some good point from there as well....

And it is through this that melodies are made. As explained elsewhere (see *Likutey Moharan* I, 54:7), the aspect of playing a musical instrument is the aspect of separating the good sounds (i.e., the air or wind) from the bad sounds, from gloom and depression. The principle is that music of holiness is extremely lofty. In essence, music is made by knowing how to separate the good from the evil. Thus, by selecting and gathering the good points (i.e., the good sounds) from the bad, melodies and songs [of life] are created. By reviving one's self by searching and seeking until he finds in himself some good points, gathering and separating those good points from the evil and impurity within him - through this melodies are made. Then, one is able to pray and sing and give praise to God.

For a sad and depressed person thinks of himself as incapable of praying. He cannot even open his mouth at all, due to the magnitude of the depression, sadness and heaviness that overcome him. However, when he nevertheless searches until he finds some remaining good points in himself, he brings himself vitality and joy. Then, when he revives himself and brings himself to joy he is then able to pray, sing and give praise to God. Know, too, that

someone who is capable of making these melodies - i.e., gathering the good points that are to be found in each Jew, even a Jewish sinner - can lead the communal prayers. For one who leads the communal prayers is called the "messenger of the people;" that is, he must be sent by all the people - i.e., he must gather every good point that is to be found in each of the congregants. All these good points are merged in him, so that when he stands up to pray, it is with all this good.

Know, too, that in each and every generation there is a shepherd who is the aspect of Moshe, the "faithful shepherd." This shepherd makes a sanctuary. And know, the young schoolchildren receive the undefiled breath of their mouths from this sanctuary. Therefore, when a young child first begins to read and enter the study of Torah, he begins with "Vayikra (He called) to Moshe" (*Leviticus* 1:1). The word Vayikra is written with a small aleph, because the Book of Vayikra speaks of the completion of the Sanctuary's erection. It was then that God called to Moshe and began speaking to him from the Sanctuary. This is why the young children begin from there, because it is from there that they receive their undefiled breath, and from there they begin to enter into Torah study...[Rebbe Nachman then explains how each of the tzaddikim (the shepherds) of the generation are responsible to teach young children Torah. He continues...]

This is the aspect of what our Sages, of blessed memory, said: Young children are snatched away [i.e., die young] because of the sin of the generation, as it is said (*Songs* 1:8), "and graze your young goats by the shepherd's *MiShKaNot* (tents)" - the young children *mitMaShKNin* (are taken as surety) for the shepherds (*Shabbat* 33b). This is the explanation of "by the shepherd's tents." They receive the breath of their mouths from the aspect of the *mishkanot* of the shepherds - i.e., the tzaddikim of the generation, each of whom makes a *mishkan* (sanctuary). However, to know all this - to know all the aspects involved in this and the generations that will come from the children to the very end of time - is one who can make the aforementioned melodies from the good points found in others and himself (*Likutey Moharan* I, 282).

The "small aleph" in Vayikra translates from Aramaic as "teach the young." It is our duty to begin teaching the young about their heritage, about purity, about what is rightfully theirs. Yet we seem to have failed miserably in our responsibility. Even though there are schools dedicated to teaching our young ones about our proud heritage, the vast majority of Jews in the world today neglect this important part of their children's curriculum. Instead they send limit their children to one hour a week of Jewish studies. Even that is only until the end of elementary school! Is it any wonder that children have no interest in their 3,000+ years of heritage which is compressed into 60 minutes a week for a few years?

We must begin to impress the importance of our heritage upon our children and grandchildren. We must explain to them our physical heritage: "We are Jews, a proud nation that has contributed civility and civilization to the entire world." We must explain to them our material heritage, the Holy Land, and we must explain to them our spiritual heritage, the Torah. By inculcating our young with the feeling and understanding of who they truly are, we will guarantee a future generation of Jews which will know the importance of its missions and goals in life. The people of such a generation will succeed at their goals, for they will be fortified with an eternal flame which will kindle their sparks even further.

And we must also explain the same to ourselves, to those of us who are now striving to begin anew, to be "young at heart," to begin each day with a fresh look at the wonders that God has wrought for us. We must always seek that good and dwell upon it, and we must always search for even more good. Finding that good leads to unity among us: "He's not so bad after all!" "I can live with that!" "There's another side to the story that I'm not aware of, so maybe we can and should get together." Then we will be able to make beautiful music - together - and to (*Songs* 4:8), "Come! Sing! From the peaks of Amanah," on our way back from exile to the Holy Land, speedily, in our days, Amen.

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