

This Land is My Land

A Breslov Perspective on the Holy Land

Essay #60 — Parshat Tazria-Metzora 5762

"And God spoke to Moshe and Aharon: 'When you come to the Land of Kanaan which I am giving to you as your inheritance, I will put the leprous curse in the houses in the Land you inherit'" (*Leviticus* 14:33-34).

God took us out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and set us free, making us into a great nation, the Chosen People. God could have led us to anywhere - the Swiss Alps, the French Riviera, the western hemisphere's "promised land" - after all, it was less than 1,000 years after the Flood and the world wasn't all that populated. However, God had promised the Holy Land to the seed of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. It was a "used land," a "second-hand land" populated by the Kanaanites, the Emorites and other nations. Nonetheless, God keeps His promises. So He told Moshe to tell the Jews that He was going to redeem them and lead them to the Chosen Land, the "Land of Milk and Honey" (*Exodus* 3:8). God took an oath to give us the Promised Land, a land "where there are brooks of water, with springs and fountains that flow from the valleys and the hills. A land of plentiful wheat and barley, vineyards, figs, pomegranates, olives and honey dates. A land where you will eat bread with satisfaction; a land which lacks nothing..." (*Deuteronomy* 8:7-9).

We are promised the Promised Land and are eventually given the Chosen Land. A land of milk and honey, of plentiful fruits, abundant water supplies, etc. And we are told, by God Himself, that in addition to all the blessings, we will be given a bonus - "a pox upon your houses!" Isn't that a winner? Now, God is certainly not a "used-land" salesman who would show us all the advantages of owning a new home in our own "second-hand" land, while concealing all its defects. No. God doesn't operate that way. He tells it like it is. "The good is yours, the blessings, the wonderful land. And, you're also going to get a leprous curse in your homes." Why would God do this to us? Especially since the "promise" of the leprous curse is in the Torah, hence it was actually written down prior to the Jews committing any sin (e.g., the spies and the golden calf). So, what's going on?

Rashi explains that the leprous curse is actually a gift (see *Vayikra Rabbah* 17:6). After the splitting of the Red Sea, fear was thrown into all the nations. "The people will hear and be afraid...trembling shall possess them... Pilashet (Philistines)...Edom...Moabites...the inhabitants of Kanaan will melt away..." (*Exodus* 15:14-15). So when the Jews were sojourning in the desert, the Kanaanites were busy hiding their wealth in the walls of their homes. They were afraid, fear fell upon them. They hid their wealth where even tax inspectors wouldn't find it - in their fields, their walls, under the floor, etc... God said, "I promised the Jews a Land filled with good!" Therefore, God brought a leprous curse upon the homes. A home so afflicted needs the "infected" area dismantled. The "infected" area was where the Kanaanites had buried their treasures. Thus the Jews will find it and inherit a "Land of Plenty, a Land filled with good."

So it is today, too. We are in the midst of the prophetic "return of the exiles to their homeland." As the Midrash (ad. loc.) cites, Yehoshua (Joshua), when approaching the Holy Land, sent three messages to

those living there:

1. He who wishes to leave the Land in peace, may do so.
2. He who wishes true peace may remain in peace.
3. He who wishes bloodshed, will get it.

The Girgashite nation chose the first option and left in peace. No one ever bothered them. The Givonite nation opted for #2; they sued for peace and were allowed to live in the Holy Land unharmed. History records their presence many centuries later, during the time of King Solomon and the Temple. Sadly, 31 kings and nations desired war and bloodshed, chose the third option. Guess what? They **ALL** lost. Because the Land belongs to the Jews and only to the Jews. Not because of their military or moral superiority, but solely by Divine fiat and Divine promise.

We are currently witnessing an amazing replay of the 31 kings who desire bloodshed. We have almost all of Islam and Arabia - Palestinians, Iraqis, Saudis, Syrians, Algerians, Egyptians, Jordanians, Yemen, Kuwait, United Gulf Emirates, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Indonesia, Iran, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Sudan, Lebanon. These are the first nineteen. We can add, thanks to the international press corps, which conveniently provides us with the names of additional nations who have joined the Arabian chorus: France, England, Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Germany, Belgium, (neutral?) Switzerland, the Scandinavian states (where Oslo began) and Russia. And of course, there's the good old USA, champion of anti-terror warfare. So we have 31 kings and nations ganging up on us, trying to make sure that we do not stay in our land by encouraging Arabian militancy. Others are permitted - even encouraged and paid to do so - to blow themselves up at the expense of innocent Jews who sit down to the Seder; to blow themselves up at the expense of people shopping for food for their homes. By calling for a policy of "restraint," the "31 kings" turn "Let My People Go" into a war slogan: "Let's Blow Your People Away."

When the Twin Towers were cruelly and viciously destroyed, America, and the world with it, vowed never to let terrorism take over or control its lives. Yet a double standard has remained in effect. Bin Laden is Public Enemy #1, and an America frustrated by not having destroyed him before the fact, seeks to make sure he'll never do it again. However, wasn't it President Reagan, who fought the "evil empire" tooth and nail, who bargained for Arafat's freedom from Beirut in 1982? Is America paying the price for its restraint? Hasn't it paid a great deal with the destruction of the Twin Towers and the Pentagon? Hasn't it learned its lesson? Why must the Jews exercise restraint against Arafat?!

Well, God promised us this Land. He also promised us a leprous curse. We got it, in human form. It has the incredible strength of an unrestrained virus (not unlike an "Arabian Strain") In the annals of history, there has never been such a people, human forms afflicted with a suicide virus, hell bent on killing without any single benefit, other than the "pleasure" of killing Jews.

However, it is we have the responsibility to recognize the cause and effect of this leprosy. The Talmud teaches that leprosy is a result of slander. Slander against the Holy Land kept the Jews in the desert for 40 years (see *Erkhin* 15a-16a). Rebbe Nachman sees in this teaching that the best way to rectify slander is by speaking in holiness, words of Torah and prayer (*Likutey Moharan* I, Lesson #3).

We have been slandered by the world press innumerable times. But that we may have slandered each other and found fault within ourselves and among ourselves, requires addressing. We can rectify slander by Torah study, especially the study of Talmud and Halakhah, for these studies heighten our awareness of God and His Law. These studies attune our souls to His Will and bring us to recognize what it is that

God seeks from us. This is especially critical now, when the chaos that currently rules seems so overwhelming. Furthermore, as the Rebbe teaches, this type of study heightens one's Daat, which rectifies the Daat and knowledge of Malkhut, the Kingship of Holiness. When this daat is rectified, the concept of prophecy is rectified and people will become aware of God (ibid.).

This is happening today. We have erred. We have slandered and destroyed many a life and we're paying the price through the Arabian Strain of the leprosy curse. Still, we **CAN** reverse the process. We **CAN** take control of the situation. As the Torah teaches us in this week's reading, we must go to the *kohein* (i.e., the tzaddik) and declare that we have seen leprous spots; the *kohein* will instruct us on how to get rid of it.

Sometimes his advice requires the dismantling of the area afflicted with the leprous curse. The Torah commands this, so dismantle we must. By following the advice of the Torah and the Kohein, not only will we finally get rid of the leprosy, but we will find untold wealth and treasures, a King's ransom, waiting for us. For the leprous curse is, in reality, a gift, a blessing. Like the Israelites of old, who found hidden treasures only by way of the leprous curse, so, too, we will gain untold blessing specifically because of the Arabian Strain of the leprous curse. For when we rectify our slanderous (and scandalous) deeds, we will draw the power of prophecy. Even if, perhaps, we are not worthy of prophecy, still, the power of the Prophets is with us, waiting in the wings. May their prophecies be fulfilled, speedily, in our days, Amen.

Hope your Pesach was OK and that from now on, things get only better.

Yours,
Chaim

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