

WHOSE LAND IS IT ANYWAY?

by Shlomo Katz

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Today's Learning:

Kinim 1:1-2

O.C. 30:4-31:1

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Avodah Zarah 65

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Yoma 25

Our parashah opens: "When you come into the Land that `Ani' / I give you. . ." This and similar phrases are found 22 times in the Torah. Why, asks R' Shaul Yedidya Elazer Taub (see page 4), does G-d remind us so many times that He is the One giving us the Land? R' Taub explains:

We read in Yoel (4:21) [and also recite in the Av Harachamim prayer on Shabbat], "Though I cleanse - their blood I will not cleanse, and Hashem dwells in Zion." What does Zion have to do with G-d's avenging the blood of our martyrs? Furthermore, this verse appears to be contradictory - has Hashem avenged their blood or not?

The answer is that although Hashem will avenge the blood of Jewish martyrs, the primary vengeance will be incomplete until G-d dwells in Zion, until G-d and His people return from their dispersion among the nations. This is the explanation for our verse, as well. When G-d refers to himself as "Ani" / "I", he is referring to His attribute of vengeance. Indeed, "Ani" is an acronym for "E-l nekamot Hashem" / "Hashem is the G-d of vengeance." When will G-d be "Ani" / the G-d of vengeance? When you come into the Land! (Quoted in Otzrot Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot)

"The seventh year shall be a complete rest for the land . . ." (25:3)

R' Moshe ibn Chaviv z"l (1654-1696; "Rishon Le'tzion" and author of several halachic works) writes: The laws of shemittah, as well as the laws of terumah and ma'aser, did not take effect until 14 years after Bnei Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael, specifically, after they completed their conquest of the Land. Why? The purpose of the agricultural laws is to remind us that G-d is the Master of the Land, not we. As long as Bnei Yisrael did not yet control the Land, they did not need that reminder.

He adds: Why is shemittah only one year in seven? Why should we not be reminded more often that the Land is G-d's? There are two answers: First, G-d has mercy on us, so He lets us work our Land for six years. In addition, it is not unusual for farmers to leave their fields fallow every third year or so in order to let the land rejuvenate. In order to make clear that this is not the purpose of shemittah, the Torah commanded that shemittah be observed only once every seven years.

(Derashot Maharam Chaviv)

"If you will say, 'What will we eat in the seventh year?'" (25:20)

R' Yisrael Isserlin z"l (author of Terumat Ha'deshen; died 1460) asks: Why would people worry about what they will eat in the seventh (i.e., the shemittah) year? In the seventh year they will eat the produce of the sixth year. If they have anything to worry about at all, it should be the eighth year!

He answers: It is human nature for people to hoard their belongings for the future. Thus, when they realize that there will be no harvest in the seventh year, they will hoard the produce of the sixth year to eat in the eighth year. Then they will worry, "What will we eat in the seventh year?"

(Beur Mahari)

"If your brother becomes impoverished . . . , ve'ha'chazakta bo." (25:35)

R' Eliezer Zusia Portugal z"l (the Skulener Rebbe) observes that the grammatically correct form of this verse would seem to have been: "If your brother becomes impoverished . . . , ve'chizakta oto / you shall strengthen him." Why does the verse say, "ve'ha'chazakta bo" / "you shall be strengthened through him"?

R' Portugal explains based on the Chafetz Chaim's similar question about Mishlei (3:18), "It [the Torah] is a tree of life for those who hold-on to it." Since this verse is speaking of those who give financial support to Torah study, should it not have said, "for those who uphold it"? This verse's lesson is that the Torah doesn't need man's support. Rather, the Torah's merit supports those who give to its institutions and students.

Says R' Portugal: Our verse teaches the same lesson, but about supporting the poor. G-d has many agents through whom to support them. The one who truly benefits - the one who is strengthened - is the one who gives charity.

(Noam Eliezer)

Pirkei Avot

"Ben Zoma says, 'Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his portion'."

(Chapter 4, Mishnah 1)

R' Yoel Sirkes z"l (the Bach; 1561-1640) explains: Every person's earnings are made up of two parts - the portion that a person is obligated to give as terumah, ma'aser, and charity, and the portion that is his to enjoy. Some people are not happy unless they keep both shares for themselves, but a truly wealthy person is the one who is content with keeping his own portion and giving the other portion to its rightful recipients.

(Meishiv Nefesh: Introduction)

"R' Yose says, 'Whoever honors the Torah will himself be honored by people'." (4:6)

Rashi explains: This refers to a person who does not put a sefer [e.g., a chumash or siddur] on a bench on which someone is sitting.

"If you neglect the study of Torah . . ." (4:10)

The Gemara (Chagigah 5b) states that there are three people over whom Hashem cries every day: (1) someone who is able to occupy himself ("la'asok") with Torah study, but who does not occupy himself thus; (2) someone who is unable to occupy himself with Torah study, but does occupy himself thus; and (3) a communal leader who acts haughtily. R' Ovadiah Yosef shlita writes: The second of these three descriptions requires explanation. [At first glance, the gemara appears to be speaking of a person who has many distractions that legitimately prevent him from studying Torah, yet he makes time to study anyway.] Why should G-d cry over such a person?

R' Yosef answers: This is not a correct understanding of the Mishnah. The term "to occupy oneself" / "la'asok" refers to advanced Torah study learning such as is necessary to render halachic decisions. The Gemara (Ta'anit 10b) records that Yosef told his brothers not to occupy themselves with Torah study on their return trip to Eretz Canaan. (See Bereishit 45:24 and Rashi.) Yet, the Gemara states that if two Torah scholars are traveling together and are not exchanging divrei Torah, they deserve to die. The Gemara itself resolves this contradiction by explaining that Yosef was referring to in-depth Torah study, while the other Talmudic statement is referring to less taxing study. Here, too, explains R' Yosef, what Hashem cries over is people who are not fit to render halachic rulings but do so anyway.

(Anaf Etz Avot)

R' Shaul Yedidya Elazar Taub z"l

R' Shaul Yedidya Elazer Taub, the second Modzhitzer Rebbe, was born in the city of Osherov, Poland, on Hoshanah Rabba 5647 / October 20, 1886. Modzhitz chassidut is known for its music, and from young Shaul's birth, an auspicious future as a musician was foretold for him, for not only was he born on the day before Simchat Torah, but the year of his birth was "zemiroth" ("songs").

R' Shaul assumed the leadership of Modzhitz in 1920 upon the passing of his father, R' Yisrael. At the outbreak of World War II, R' Shaul made his way through Lithuania, Russia, China and Japan, then to San Francisco, and, from there, to New York. From 1940 until 1947 he resided in Brooklyn, New York. During this time, he traveled extensively, bringing Torah and chassidic music to many communities. It is claimed that he was probably the most prolific Hasidic composer of all time with his total compositions numbering close to 1000. The famous chazzan, Ben Zion Shenker, was his musical secretary.

In keeping with a tradition established by his father, R' Shaul created new melodies for the Hallel text so that the verses could be sung as marches. It is reported that when chassidim questioned both the composition and singing of such march tunes by a people without country, flag or military, R' Shaul's responded prophetically that a Jewish State would soon come into being and that marches would then needed.

R' Shaul was also renowned for his Torah learning and for his love for Am Yisrael. He was especially known for his extraordinary love for Eretz Yisrael. He said: "Certainly, Yeshivat Eretz Yisrael / living in Eretz Yisrael is no less important a mitzvah than putting on tefilin. Would one think that he can perform the mitzvah of tefilin simply by thinking about it or intending or wanting to do it? Even with the greatest of intentions, one who does not actually tie the tefilin onto his arm and head does not fulfill any mitzvah. The same is true of Yeshivat Eretz Yisrael." R' Shaul himself visited Eretz Yisrael three times from Poland. His fourth and last trip to Eretz Yisrael was from the United States in 1947, and he planned to settle there on that occasion. Suddenly, however, he became ill, and he passed away on Shabbat, 16 Kislev 5708 / November 29, 1947, the very day that the U.N. voted to partition "Palestine" and create a Jewish state. It is believed that R' Shaul was the last person buried on Har Hazeitim (Mount of Olives) until after the Six Day War. (Source: www.modzitz.org)

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