FOR THE LOVE OF G-D

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

Perhaps there is among you a man, woman, family, or tribe, whose heart turns away from Hashem, our G-d today to follow and to serve the gods of these nations; maybe there is among you a source that would proliferate and spread evil in your midst, [who] upon hearing the words of this curse thinks to himself, "I will be fine, even though I do as I please." In order to add the inadvertent transgressions to the premeditated one, G-d will not be willing to forgive him. G-d will be angry and His jealousy will rage against that man, and all the curses of this book will come after him. G-d will wipe away his name from under heaven. G-d will single him out for evil from all the tribes of Israel and cause him to experience all the curses of the covenant recorded in this Book of the Law. (Devarim 29:17-20)

"G-d will single him out for evil ... The gematria (of the Hebrew words) is equal to 'This is Yeravam.'" (Ba'al HaTurim)

Yeravam ben Nevat, that is. He was the first king of the Kingdom of Israel after the Ten Tribes seceded from the Kingdom of Yehudah after Shlomo HaMelech's death in the year 2964/797 BCE. Yeravam was from the tribe of Ephraim, which came from the tribe of Yosef.

So evil was Yeravam that he closed the roads to the Temple and set up golden calves to keep his subjects from serving G-d. And when he did:

... A hut was built and this was the Italia of Greece ... (Shabbos 56b)

It would take hundreds of year, but the Talmud is saying that Yeravam planted the spiritual "roots" that would eventually produce a Rome capable of destroying the Second Temple.

So chutzpadik was Yeravam that the Talmud records:

After this thing, Yeravam did not return from his evil way. (I Melachim 13:33). After what? Rava said: After The Holy One, Blessed is He, grabbed Yeravam by his cloak and said to him,
"Return, and I, you, and the son of Yishai will stroll together in Gan Aiden."
"Who will lead?" he asked.
"Ben Yishai will lead." He [G-d] answered him.

"If so," he ended, *"then I don't want it!"* (Sanhedrin 102a)

However, so brilliant was Yeravam that:

When Yeravam left Jerusalem he met the prophet Achiah HaShiloni along the way, who was wearing a new garment ... (I Melachim 11:29) What does this mean? Rav Nachman said: Just as a new garment has no spots, so too did the teaching of Yeravam have no error. According to others: They renewed things that no ear has ever heard. What does, "And the two of them were alone in the field" mean? All other scholars were like the plants of the field compared to them. (Sanhedrin 102a)

Furthermore:

When Yeravam was young he was a tzaddik. The Ministering Angels said, "Let him live, the grandeur of Your Name is because of him ..." G-d told them, "If you wish it I will allow him to live." (Zohar Chadash, Acharei Mos 40:8)

Yet:

... And then he built the golden calves and caused all Israel to sin. (Zohar Chadash, Acharei Mos 40:8)

What went wrong? What went wrong is what always goes wrong, as the posuk above states. Deep inside, perhaps far below the surface where it is barely perceptible by the conscious mind, a person thinks to himself:

"I will be fine, even though I do as I please."

The Torah is talking about an attitude. It doesn't mean that the person is rebelling against G-d in any obvious way; it just means that a person feels content to fulfill his or her desire, without fear of Divine repercussion. After all, lightening does not come down from the sky every time we sin! But it is precisely this attitude that is the worse "lightening" of all, for it leads to an even greater spiritual malaise that has the power to corrupt even the most righteous over time.

Shabbos Day:

The hidden things belong to Hashem, our G-d, but that which is revealed belongs to us, and to our children forever, to follow all the words of this law. (Devarim 29:26)

... I will not punish you for that which is hidden from you, for that belongs to G-d, and for that He will exact punishment from the individual ... but for those things which are revealed and belong to us and to our children in order that we will do away with evil from our midst. If we do not execute judgment upon people who publicly transgress, then the whole community will be punished. There are dots above the letters (in the Sefer Torah) of the words "lunnu ulvaneinu" ("us, and to our children") to hint

that even for revealed sins He did not punish the community until they had crossed the Jordan River (into Eretz Yisroel), from the moment they took upon themselves the oath on Har G'rizim and Har Eival and had become responsible for one another. (Rashi)

Rashi is referring to the well-known principle of "every Jew is a guarantor for his brother" (Sanhedrin 27b). The question is, what did Eretz Yisroel change that transformed the Jewish people from a nation of individuals to one of a single identity, if not physically, at least spiritually. The truth is, the Torah itself supplies the answer:

For, the land you are about to possess is not like Egypt from where you came, and in which if you sowed seeds, you had to bring water to them as you would for a garden of green herbs. The land you are about to possess has mountains and deep valleys, and is watered by rain from the sky-a land which Hashem, your G-d, cares for, Hashem, your G-d pays attention to continuously the entire year. (Devarim 11:11-12)

Eretz Yisroel, which "was created before the rest of the world" (Ta'anis 10a), and which is considered (spiritually) "higher than all other lands" (Kiddushin 69b), is land of Hashgochah Pratis-Divine Providence. Hence, Eretz Yisroel, like the Kodesh Kodashim, has the capability to rise above nature:

Why is Eretz Yisroel compared to a deer? Just like the skin of a deer does not contain its flesh, neither does Eretz Yisroel contain its fruit ... so too is Eretz Yisroel the fastest to ripen its fruits ... (Kesuvos 112a) ... Just like the skin of a deer does not contain its flesh, neither does Eretz Yisroel contain its flesh when they live on her. (Gittin 57a)

Furthermore, says the Pri Tzaddik, the goal of inheriting a portion of Eretz Yisroel was to help each Jew find his own portion within Torah Sh'b'al Peh-Oral Law (Zohar Chadash 2:137b), which translates into a better ability to relate to Torah. This is why the midrash concludes:

There is no wisdom like the wisdom of Eretz Yisroel (Bereishis Rabbah 16)

and:

The air of Eretz Yisroel makes a person wise. (Bava Basra 158b)

After all:

Ten measures of wisdom fell to the world, nine of which fell on Eretz Yisroel, and one on the rest of the world. (Kiddushin 49b)

As the Vilna Gaon points out, Da'as, or Heavenly wisdom, is what possesses the ability to unify disparate parts. It is such knowledge-the knowledge of the Aitz HaChaim (Tree of Life)-that gives us the ability to transcend our personal biases and petty interests and unify, as we did at Har Sinai. If so, then Eretz Yisroel, and only Eretz Yisroel possesses the ability to unify the Jewish people and Torah with G-d. This is why the Talmud concludes:

Three wonderful gifts were given by The Holy One, Blessed is He, to the Jewish people, and all of them were given through hardship. They are Torah, Eretz Yisroel, and, The World-to-Come. (Brochos 5a)

For, in the end, they are just three different aspects of one idea: channels for us to receive and enjoy the Supernal Light of G-d.
