

APPARENTLY HEIR-APPARENT

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

*When you come into the land which G-d, your G-d gives to you as an inheritance, and possess it . . .
(Devarim 26:1)*

We are heading down to the wire. There are only one-and-a-half weeks until Rosh Hashanah and a new year. And what a year it has been! There have been so many changes; some expected and some completely out of the blue - literally. In the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001, 25,000 people could easily have died, but by a miracle only less than 3,000 people perished. Near the end of 5765, a hurricane (Katrina), and they rarely kill a hundred people, resulted in the deaths of 25,000 people and we are still counting.

"Who by fire, and who by water . . ." Those words have had tremendous significance this last past year. What will they mean in the upcoming year?

What is the nature of an inheritance? The root of the word is "heir," meaning, someone who is legally entitled to the property of the one who has died. However, that implies that the original owner from whom it is being inherited already purchased/owned the land in the first place to create the legal connection to the land. Who was that in this case?

Thus, Rashi said:

In the beginning, G-d made the Heaven and the Earth . . . (Bereishis 1:1)

Rebi Yitzchak said, "The Torah should have begun with, "This month shall be for you the first of months" (Shemos 12:1), which is the first commandment given to Israel. Why does it begin with Creation? Because, "He declared to His people the strength of His works in order that He might give to them the heritage of the nations" (Tehillim 111:6). For, should the peoples of the world say to the Jewish people, "You are robbers, because you took by force the lands of the seven nations!", the Jewish people can respond to them, "All the earth belongs to The Holy One, Blessed is He; He created it and gave it to whom He pleased. When He willed He gave it to them, and when He willed He took it from them and gave it to us." (Rashi)

Thus, G-d set the record straight from the start: He is the owner of all the lands, and therefore, He is in a position to give land as an eternal inheritance to whomever He wishes. Therefore, though He could have given the land to us as a gift, and it would have been binding, giving it to the Jewish

people as an "inheritance" implies not only a legal connection to the land, but that we are also heirs to G-d's property, so-to-speak.

Of course, someone does not need to die first to make possible the transference of ownership to an heir; it can happen during one's lifetime as well, which is important in this case since G-d never dies. And, of course, one can reject his inheritance by simply not taking possession of it when such possession is possible, or even by just showing a disdain for the gift of his ancestor before he even receives it.

This is why four-fifths of the Jewish population of Egypt in Moshe Rabbeinu's time died during the Plague of Darkness: they had rejected their portion in the inheritance of Eretz Yisroel and had opted to stay in Egypt instead. What they hadn't figured on was that their very existence depended upon receiving their inheritance, since it also implied they didn't wish to be G-d's heirs.

As to why this is so, the posuk makes clear:

I am G-d, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be a G-d to you. (Vayikra 25:38)

Thus, inheriting Eretz Yisroel was about far more than simply inheriting a piece of land on the east side of the Mediterranean Sea. Rather, it was about inheriting G-d Himself, something that only the Land of Israel makes possible, as the Talmud states:

One should always live in the Land of Israel, even in a town where most of its inhabitants are idolaters. Let no one live outside the Land, even in a town where most of its inhabitants are Jews. For whoever lives in the Land of Israel may be considered to have a G-d, but whoever lives outside the Land may be regarded as one who has no G-d. For it says, "I am G-d, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be G-d to you" (Vayikra 25:38). He doesn't have any G-d? Rather, it is to tell you that whoever lives outside of the Land may be regarded as one who worships idols. Similarly, it was said in [the story of] David, "For they have driven me out this day that I should not cleave to the inheritance of the L-rd, saying: 'Go, serve other G-ds.'" (I Shmuel 26:19) But who said to David, "Serve other G-ds"? Rather, it is to tell you that whoever lives outside the Land may be regarded as one who worships idols. (Kesuvos 110b)

The question is, why is this so?

SHABBOS DAY:

... Then you must take from the first of all the fruit that grows from the ground that G-d, your G-d gives to you, put it in a basket ... (Devarim 26:2)

There is little that shows possession of land more than planting in it and harvesting the crop. In halachah, if a person remains on someone's land for three uncontested years, harvesting each year, then he becomes a muchzak; it is assumed that he is the legal owner of the property in question.

As mentioned earlier in other essays, the Vilna Gaon saw the re-harvesting of the land by the Jewish people after 2,000 years of its remaining barren as not only a big mitzvah, but an essential part of the final battle against Amalek at the End-of-Days. According to the GR"A, Amalek only has hold over the land while it remains desolate, and therefore, he does whatever he can to make it remain that way.

That is why the before-and-after pictures of Gush Katif are so frightening. Before, there were beautiful red-roofed houses and greenhouses producing 70 percent of the bug-free produce in this country. After, there is only rubble. It is amazing how long it took to build up the area and how quickly it came down, something, perhaps, only the people of Louisiana can now understand today.

As many point out today, the merit that has kept the secular Zionists around for so long was their affiliation with the religious Zionists, and the fact that they built cities in Eretz Yisroel. The real hitnatkut that resulted from the fall of Gush Katif was the severance of the religious Zionists from the secular ones, virtually cutting off the flow of life-giving kedushah to the Klipos. As for the cities they built, they are tearing them down as hitnatkut spreads like a virus throughout Eretz Yisroel.

The bringing of the first-fruits: is our proof of ownership over the land and to the Temple, and was a way of acknowledging that being an heir would be meaningless if there wasn't someone from which to inherit. Jews took the very symbol of that inheritance and brought it up to the very Source of that inheritance, to G-d Himself, completing the circle of relationship.

This is not possible in Chutz L'Aretz because the mitzvos dependent upon the land, such as Bikurim, are not applicable there. True, a Jew must be grateful for all that he has no matter where he is living in the world, and to show appreciation for that good at all times. However, there is nothing like actually bringing in the bounty with which we have been blessed back to G-d, in part, to connect our lives to Him.

Obviously, G-d is a Jew's G-d no matter where he lives. Nevertheless, in Eretz Yisroel there are built-in mechanisms to focus us on this reality on a daily basis, primarily with the produce of the land upon which we survive. Torah is also our inheritance, but it is the food upon which we live that makes the average Jew real with life, and real with the Source of his life-giving inheritance.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

... And go up to the place which G-d, your G-d will choose to place His Name. (Devarim 26:2)

Of course, nothing concretizes the fact that we are heirs of G-d and His Presence more than the fact the He has chosen to allow a house to be built for His Shechinah, the place of contact between Heaven and Earth. And, even though the Temple is not built at this time, the Temple Mount clearly exists as a reminder of this reality. One day the Temple will surely return.

One may ask, "But in the meantime, there are two mosques on the Temple Mount, and access, for the most, remains forbidden to the Jewish people?"

Though it is painful to see this, it is not complicated to understand. If the mosque wasn't there, then either a church or a hotel would be there, both of which are very poor substitutions for the Temple. For the Arabs, with all their mishugas, at least worship a single version of G-d.

In fact, far more remarkable than the fact that the mosques are still there is the fact that the Western Wall (the Kotel) also remains and is open to the prayers for the Jewish people. Given the dynamics of world history, only a very little trace of the Temple should exist at all today, and the Arab world is doing all it can to expedite the process. However, the Kotel does remain and Jews can sit in the dust of their Temple of the past, waiting patiently for arrival of the third and final Temple.

The truth is, the fact that the Temple Mount is a place of worship to a foreign religion, and that its icons are so clearly visible as one enters the Western Wall Square, is a vivid and painful reminder that, as good as life has become for the Jew today, the Shechinah is still in exile, and therefore, so are we. They walk freely where we cannot walk because they lack the laws of spiritual purity, reminding us that, as pure as we feel, we are still quite impure.

Tisha B'Av only occurs once a year for the Jewish nation. However, for the Jew who makes a point of descending the stairs to the Kotel area on a weekly, if not a daily basis, it is Tisha B'Av EVERYDAY that we have to witness with our own eyes and ears the current status of the Temple Mount. Personally, it is such an experience that enhances my feeling of the Presence of G-d, for I can better feel the sorrow of the Shechinah that is forced to "wander" like Her people the entire time Her house remains un- built.

It is ironic, that a churban (destruction) can invoke such a level of G-d- consciousness as the G-d of the Jewish people in Eretz Yisroel, in ways that the most lovely shul in Chutz L'Aretz cannot. For, even the most fortified shul in the Diaspora still represents a temporary reality, even if it should exist forever, at some point, it has to make its way to Eretz Yisroel.

On the other hand, the place of G-d's Name is as permanent a reality as one can get in this world, even if the Temple is not physically there.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Moshe, and the Levitical priests told all of Israel, *"Be careful and pay attention Israel: today you have become the people of G-d, your G-d. Therefore, obey G-d, your G-d, and do His commandments and His statutes, which I command you this day."* (Devarim 27:9-10)

Which brings us to the blessings and the curses: The parshah starts off on a friendly tone and then seems to change gears as it launches into the blessings for obedience and the curses for the opposite. What is the connection to idea of inheritance of the land and the bringing up of Bikurim?

It has been said that we only hurt the ones we love; the ones we don't love, we don't care enough about to hurt them.

The truth is a little different than that. If we hurt the ones we love, it is not for the sake of hurting them, but in response to the hurt that we ourselves have already felt. The more mature approach is to say, "I don't know if you realize it, but what you just said really hurt my feelings." The less mature way to communicate the same message is to hurt the other person back, hoping he or she will get the message and say, "Oh, did I hurt you? Sorry about that."

Sometimes, however, even if we take the more mature approach it only gets worst. Rather than apologize for the hurt they have caused, people often show resentment for being accused of improper behavior. This creates a circle of hurt that can often end up in a temporary or even permanent, G-d forbid, breakdown in the relationship. It is amazing how much people can hurt one another in the name of love, or more accurately, in need of love.

G-d always takes the mature approach in pointing out to the Jewish people where they have strayed in terms of the relationship. However, the Jewish people do not always take to the message in a mature and responsible way, and often continue with their spiritually abusive behavior, increasing the "hurt," so-to-speak, to G-d.

Of course, we can't really ever hurt G-d; G-d is not emotionally vulnerable as we humans are. Nevertheless, He likes to show us what we are doing in human terms so that we can relate to the consequences of our actions. Therefore, after seeing that we have not responded correctly to His protest against our misbehavior, He turns up the volume on the protest, until life becomes as unbearable as we have made it for Him, so- to-speak.

Believe it or not, all of it is meant to show us, the Jewish people, how much we matter to G-d, and how much He considers us to be His heirs, so-to- speak. Then, once we realize that, we can then appreciate what it is we are meant to inherit, and what that inheritance is meant to mean to us. Then, we can finally COME up to the land, for entering Eretz Yisroel is about far more than simply moving onto the land; it is about playing the role of the heir-apparent to the One Who created the world and Who decides to whom every parcel of land will go.

Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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