

BIRTH OF A LAND

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

And I pleaded to G-d at that time, "G-d, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness, and Your strong hand. What G-d is there in heaven or on earth Who can do as You have done, with the same power? I pray to you, please let me pass over and see the good land on the other side of the Jordan, that good mountain, and Levanon." (Devarim 3:23-25)

We could use some consolation, indeed, a lot of it, everyone in their own way. For Moshe Rabbeinu in this week's parshah, it was repealing the decree against him and getting Heavenly permission to enter Eretz Yisroel. But alas! it was not to come, and Moshe Rabbeinu was forced to remain chutz L'Aretz, with a heavy heart.

But Moshe Rabbeinu was a man with a mission. It wasn't just a question of seeing the land for him, because G-d gave him a miraculous view of the land from Har Nevo, where he died. There was something else Moshe Rabbeinu had hoped to accomplish while there, which is why he could not enter the land, in spite of all his pleading.

It is an interesting note of Hashgochah Pratit that U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, mentioned recently to reporters in Washington that "The world may be seeing 'the birth pains of a new Middle East'" (Mideast-bound Rice rejects quick truce, seeks broad solution, by Mike McCarthy Jul 21, 2006, 18:59 GMT). A more accurate statement would have "birth pains of Eretz Yisroel."

Everyone talks in terms of the "birth pangs of Moshiach," but what we are really witnessing is the birth pangs of a country. I don't mean politically, but spiritually. The Land of Israel has always been there physically, but it has never really quite had the chance to be there spiritually. That is why the Temples could be destroyed, the Jewish people could be exiled, and that sin can occur here at all.

For, just as there is a difference between the first set of Tablets with which Moshe Rabbeinu descended Har Sinai, and the second set, likewise is there a difference - a BIG difference between Eretz Yisroel as it is meant to be, and as it is at present. The spiritual impact of being involved with the Torah of the First Tablets would have automatically and eternally transformed a person, never allowing for any kind of spiritual backsliding. Likewise, had the tribes of Reuven, Gad, and Menashe crossed the Jordan river - making the total 600,000 males above the age of 20 years - and settled the land with the rest of the tribes, the Sitra Achra would have been destroyed, and Eretz Yisroel would have had the status of Gan Aiden on earth, as it will in Yemot HaMoshiach.

Thus, instead of conquering only the seven nations of Canaan, we would have destroyed all ten, eliminating all the ten sefirot of the K'lipot and ridding the world of ALL spiritual impurity. This would have broken the spiritual bindings that tie down Eretz Yisroel to the rest of the physical world, allowing it to elevate level-after-level, until it reached its lofty spiritual state.

It's not that the physical land would have ripped itself free at its borders and floated heavenward like a helium balloon. The physical land would not have moved anywhere. However, the moment a person would have entered the kedushah of Eretz Yisroel by crossing over its border, he would have felt like Moshe Rabbeinu entering the cloud on top of Mt. Sinai, which brought him into Heaven.

SHABBOS DAY:

"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)

Thus, entering the land in Yehoshua's time was only a pseudo-conquest of the K'lipot. As a result, they have been able to fight back, preventing Eretz Yisroel from being able to become itself. She lacks the ability to overwhelm impurity, which is why so many people have been spiritually vulnerable on the land over the years.

The problem really began when we didn't actually fully leave Egypt, or to use the language of the posuk, taken out of Egypt. To leave Egypt completely would have meant that four-fifths of the Jewish people would not have died in the Plague of Darkness, and the one-fifth that survived would never have doubted God in the desert. Indeed, we would not have had to wander the desert since, according to the Arizal, Egypt would have been elevated and spiritual impurity would have been destroyed then and there.

Thus, the Jewish people spiritually hobbled out of Egypt, and likewise, we spiritually hobbled into Eretz Yisroel. And, just as we left Jews behind in Egypt during the exodus, we left Jews outside of Eretz Canaan once we arrived. The "soul" that Eretz Yisroel had waited since Creation to receive only partially arrived, and therefore her birth itself was partial.

However, an imperative of Creation is that G-d become our G-d, which is dependent upon our "reaching" Eretz Yisroel, which as the posuk indicates, is dependent upon our leaving Egypt - spiritually-speaking - completely, and for good. As the Arizal says in Seder HaGilgulim, Mitzrayim is the "mother of all k'lipot", and as long as she is allowed to survive in any form or anywhere, the rest of Creation is held back from achieving its potential fulfillment.

In other words, the spiritual leaving of Egypt is synonymous with the spiritual birth of Eretz Yisroel. To succeed at one is to succeed at the other. Though it takes time to physically travel from Egypt to Eretz Yisroel, conceptually, the moment you leave one, the moment you arrive at the other, in proportion to how much you have left the other.

In fact, Mitzrayim and Eretz Yisroel are really just two polar extremes on one continuum, like the Nun

Sha'arei Tuma and the Nun Sha'arei Kedushah - the Fifty Gates of Impurity and the Fifty Gates of Holiness. Thus, even the direction one is "walking" makes a world of difference between spiritually "falling" and spiritually "getting up". A Jew has to keep his feet pointing to the "right", in the direction of the Nun Sha'arei Kedushah at all times.

Hence, the border of Eretz Yisroel is the Jordan river, "Yarden" in Hebrew, spelled: Yud-Raish-Dalet-Nun, or, "yarad nun" - Nun descended - implying that Eretz Yisroel is the place of the Nun Sha'arei Kedushah, and to leave her borders for Chutz L'Aretz is to descend in levels from Kedushah (Tuv HaAretz).

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

G-d also got angry at me because of you, saying, "You also will not go there. Yehoshua, the son of Nun who stands before you will go there. Strengthen him, because it is he who will cause Israel to inherit it." (Devarim 1:37)

When was the last time that a tzaddik made any kind of personal plea from G-d for himself? Quite the contrary: when it comes to the problems of others, the righteous will do just about anything just short of offering themselves up as a human sacrifice on an altar to G-d to invoke Divine mercy for others. And they would do that too if the Torah only permitted it.

"VaEtchanan" - Moshe pleaded on behalf of the Jewish people. "Not for my sake," he begged G-d, "but for THEIR sake, for people who are like children who can be easily influenced down the dark path back to Mitzrayim Š" especially since they never really left it in the first place. At least let me leave this world knowing that their feet are point in the right direction! Allow me to help the birth process of Eretz Yisroel, even I do not get a chance to live to enjoy it!"

We didn't merit it. We did merit to be led across the Jordan river by Yehoshua Bin Nun - Salvation that is a son of Nun - that is, one generation down from the real thing. For Moshe is compared to the sun, Yehoshua to the moon, and redemption was only meant to be partial at that time. It doesn't mean that, having come so far that we still could not go the final distance; we could. It just meant that doing so required a lot more effort than had it come while being guided by the "sun", as opposed to the "moon", whose light is only a reflection of that of the sun.

History speaks for itself. Backsliding is an understatement. Struggle was the reality. And Eretz Yisroel was left unable to reach her potential by a long shot, and thus has been struggling to be born for over the 3,300 years now, and we are watching the beginning of the end of that long drawn out process. The birth pangs of Moshiach are the same as the birth pangs of Eretz Yisroel in order for her to become the land destined to be home to G-d's "treasured nation".

Which brings us to today. From the outside, it does not look good. To begin with, so much of the Israeli population is secular, and with a vengeance. There are things taking place in this land that belong in the Mitzrayim of old, or to the people of Canaan who were thrown out of here because of

their depraved practices. Not only is the Israeli government not guided by Torah, but it makes laws that counter Torah law, and it is a government that has even jettisoned pieces of Eretz HaKodesh.

This does not look like birth pangs, but death throes, G-d forbid. But the truth is, for a while, the two often appear to be one and the same thing. Indeed, women are not commanded to have children as men are because it is dangerous for them to give birth. The trick is to be able to distinguish between the two of them, since in this case the delivery room is the entire universe itself.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Happy is the man whom G-d disciplines... (Tehillim 94:12)

Discussing this idea with a friend of mine, he told me an interesting personal story.

Something had happened in his life that threw him for a spiritual loop, and though he often said, "All is for the good," he was having a difficult time seeing the good in this situation. He found himself being dragged into a situation that went against everything he had tried to become, and involved things he had tried so hard to avoid. But that's Hashgochah Pratit for you.

As much as he knew that he would survive the outcome, he also knew that the situation had the potential to change his life and that of his family. As a result, he found himself doing teshuvah, in ways that he always knew he should but was too weak to do it in the past. "I always felt what I was doing was fine by G-d, and what I didn't do so well I figured He understood, since things continued to go my way," he told me.

After a contemplative pause, he told me, "But then all of a sudden things blow up in your face and you feel that you were wrong; G-d wasn't happy with you, just waiting until you did teshuvah, which I didn't do. I'm sure," he said, "that I had done the teshuvah then that I am doing now, after the fact, I could have avoided this entire mess I'm now in."

In other words, he was saying, the "mess" was forcing him to clean up his act. It made him once again feel accountable for his actions, especially the negative ones. By going "against" him, Heaven had in fact been helping him, and the result is a Jew with more fear of G-d, and less tolerance for his spiritual weaknesses. He was a changed man.

It's hard to know exactly what G-d thinks about us today, or just how many Jews He expects to do teshuvah, and how much. But, I think we can say with some certainty that we do have room for improvement, improvement that Eretz Yisroel needs if it is going to shake off the shackles of exile and rise to fulfill her spiritual potential. As each crisis occurs to the Jewish people, especially here in Eretz HaKodesh, there are many who became changed people.

The crises are controlled from Heaven. They can turn them on or turn them off at a moment's notice. But teshuvah is man's job, and it doesn't count when G-d does it for us. We are in the midst of leaving Egypt once-and-for-all, and to do that all false dependencies must go. They are going, and

have been going for some time, and as a result of this, our generation is witnessing the birth of a new Eretz Yisroel.

*Mazel Tov and Nechamah Shlaimah,
PW*

Text

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