

OUT OF PLACE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

"He afflicted you, and caused you to go hungry, and gave you manna to eat which you did not recognize, nor did your ancestors experience it, so that He could teach you that man does not live by bread alone, but by whatever G-d says should exist, does man live." (Devarim 8:3)

To understand the importance of the message of the manna, we must first understand the *raison d'être* of the Jewish people.

We have been called "The Wandering Jew", since we have been wandering for over 3,300 years now. Not only did we wander for 40 years in the desert after leaving Egypt back at our beginning, but we been wandering ever since. Indeed, no people has been exiled and sent packing as many times as the Jewish people have throughout their long history, no matter how hospitable the host nation was at the beginning. Exile, for the Jewish people, was so inevitable.

Amazingly, this has been true even after assimilation. Unlike other peoples who assimilate into their host cultures and lose their unique identity after long periods of time, the Jewish people still get singled out and exiled. The Nazis, y"s, surfaced, exiled, and murdered Jews who long ago had stopped being Jews, at least as far as they were concerned. It seems as if the concept of "settling down" does not apply to the Jew in the Diaspora, for the simple reason stated explicitly in the following posuk:

"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, according to the verse, the idea of G-d being the G-d of the Jewish people is intrinsically bound up with Eretz Yisroel, as the Talmud says (Ketuvot 110b). And, since the entire point of saving the Jewish people from Egypt was for G-d to become the G-d of the Jewish people, and as the posuk says, Eretz Yisroel is the only place for this to really happen, and all the Jewish people can really do until such time as this truly happens is, wander.

Thus, when Moshe Rabbeinu tries to convince his father-in-law Yitro to join the Jewish people on their journey to Eretz Yisroel, he does not use the name Eretz Canaan or Eretz Yisroel. Rather, he refers to the land as "HaMakom" — "the Place".

Moshe said to Chovev, Moshe's father-in-law, the son of Reuel the Midianite, "We are journeying to

HaMakom (the place) which G-d said He would give to us. Join us; you will benefit, for G-d has promised Israel good." (Bamidbar 10:29)

This is a euphemism for G-d as well, to indicate to Yitro that finding G-d was not merely about converting to Judaism, but also about living in Eretz Yisroel. The question is, what is it specifically that allows Eretz Yisroel to be such a ladder to G-d, more than any other land? And, another question is, what is so special about the Name "HaMakom" that Rabbi Chaim Volozhin spent 15 chapters of Nefesh HaChaim to explain?

They say in Avot, "And when you pray, don't make your prayer fixed, rather [pray for] mercy and [offer] supplications before HaMakom, Boruch Hu". By using the word "Makom" they hint to a very deep matter, which requires explanation in order to understand the depth of their intention. (Nefesh HaChaim, Sha'ar 3, Ch. 1)

One thing is certain, in the context of G-d, "HaMakom" is about far more than a place, it is about an idea, or rather, a state of being, a state of existence. It is the sum total of all understanding of the wondering Jew, and therefore it is the end destination of the wandering Jew.

Rather, the word "Makom" is used to describe G-d, as explained in Bereishit Rabbah, Ch. 68, on the verse, "He [Ya'akov] arrived at the place..." (Bereishit 28:11). Rebi Huna in the name of Rebi Eliezer said, "Why is The Holy One, Blessed is He, called 'Makom'? Because He is the place of the world, but the world is not His place." ...According to the simple explanation, it means, just as a place holds that which is placed upon it, likewise is the Master of Everything, may His Name be blessed, the true place that "holds" and sustains all the world and creations. Hence, if He were to remove His reality from them for even just a moment, G-d forbid, the place and the existence would become nothing, as it says, "You give life to everything" (Nechemiah 9:6). (Ibid.)

However, that was only the simplest explanation of the word.

SHABBAT DAY:

"On the third day, Avraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar." (Bereishit 22:4)

At first, explains the Nefesh HaChaim, he didn't even want to delve into the matter further, since it is so esoteric, and the earlier generations only hinted to it. However, he further explains, the need of the generation, and he was living at the end of the 18th century, pushed him to do so, and therefore he did.

Thus, he explains:

Therefore, Chazal call Him, may His Name be blessed, "HaKadosh Baruch Hu" — The Holy One, Blessed is He, for included in this holy Name are the two levels. "Kadosh" means "separate" and "elevated," and that is with respect to Himself, for in truth, He is very separate and elevated above any matter of distinction and change. Rather, He fills everything completely and equally, and is

exalted above any blessing or praise; He requires no blessing, G-d forbid... However, regarding our understanding of existence and the worlds, He is called "Baruch", so-to-speak, because with respect to His connection to Creation, there is the need for an increase and an enhancement of blessing through the good actions of man... Hence, "HaKadosh Boruch Hu": with respect to Himself, "Kadosh", but with respect to us, "Baruch", but it is all one. (Ibid., Ch. 5)

The Nefesh HaChaim is addressing an issue that we take for granted, although we never should. Any Torah-observant Jew knows that there are places that you can learn Torah and make blessings, and places where you cannot. Any place that is, according to the Torah, an impure place, such as a garbage room, a bathroom, or even a bath house in which people are likely to sweat, one should not mention anything to do with G-d or Torah. On one level, this is obvious: it is disrespectful to G-d and Torah. On a Kabbalistic level, it is more than disrespectful, it is dangerous, since such places are often locations of the Chitzonim, "messengers" of spiritual impurity who feed off of holiness and become strengthened by it. Even though theoretically, G-d is also in such places, and on the same level He is everywhere else in Creation, including the Holy of Holies in the Temple, and in all the upper holy and spiritual worlds.

As easy as it is to state such a dichotomy, intellectually, it is not one that is easy to fathom. Thus, the Torah is very explicit about the laws of purity and impurity, most of which fall into the category of "Chukim" — statutes whose meaning and purpose is not so clear to us, if at all. Some people can't handle the paradox at all, and either give up on the holiness of G-d or the impurity inherent in Creation. However, for the Jew, living with such inherent intellectual inconsistency is part-and-parcel of what is called "Emunat Yisroel" — the Faith of Israel.

Indeed, it is reminiscent of one of the most important and ground-breaking episodes in Jewish history: the Akeidah. What made the Akeidah unique was not Avraham's willingness to sacrifice Yitzchak to G-d as commanded, for he was the perfect, loyal servant. What made the Akeidah unique was that it was a contradiction of an earlier promise made to Avraham:

G-d told Avraham, "Do not be bothered because of the boy and your maidservant. Everything that Sarah tells you, listen to her, because it is through Yitzchak that you will have posterity." (Bereishit 21:12)

Really? And how did the Akeidah fulfill that promise? Yitzchak had yet to marry and therefore, had yet to provide Avraham with grandchildren through whom his spiritual legacy could live on. Had G-d changed His mind? G-d forbid. We can't imagine how many times this question must have run through Avraham Avinu's mind over the course of his three-day journey up to Har HaMoriah, the place referred to as:

"On the third day, Avraham lifted up his eyes and saw HaMakom (the place) — from afar." (Bereishit 22:4)

Apparently, Avraham had "arrived".

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

"G-d said to Avram, 'Go for yourself from your land, your birthplace, and your father's house, to the land which I will show you.'" (Bereishit 12:1)

The word for prohibition in halachic language is "issur". Thus, if you ask most Torah-observant Jews what the word "issur" actually means, they will answer, "prohibition". However, they would be incorrect, because it really means "binding", as in tying up.

What's the connection? It is simple, yet profound: sin is the result of being overly bound up to the pleasures of this world. For, almost everything the Torah forbids there is a permissible version of it; it is often a question of when, and how, more than of if yes or no. Unlike with respect to other religions, the Torah acknowledges the basic instincts and needs of man, and offers a way to fulfill them in a holy manner. According to Kabbalah, history is about elevating all aspects of Creation and making them "holy to G-d", which we do by partaking in the pleasures of this world in a Torah manner.

The trouble with this world is that life is fleeting; it has no permanence. As the rabbis taught:

This world is like a corridor before the World-to-Come. Rectify yourself in the "corridor" in order to be able to enter the Banquet Hall. (Pirkei Avot 4:16)

Hence, in this world, we can only be just passing through on the way to the main event, the World-to-Come. In fact, the idea of permanence is the idea of eternity, the amount of permanence being dependent upon the amount of eternity. Even from the moment you are born you are dying, and from the moment you drive the car out of the showroom it drops in price. Nothing in this world is stationary; nothing in this world really has a place, at least in the ultimate, eternal sense of the word.

The myth, or perhaps the genius, of the Western world is its ability to give a sense of permanence to that which is really transient. It is really nothing more than the golden calf, which represented the worship of the illusion that the pleasures of this world can be permanent, and therefore worth the supreme sacrifice.

In the end, the builders of the golden calf watched it being ground to dust, and were killed because of it, or made to drink water with which it was mixed. It was symbolic of what happens to anyone who is overly bound up to the pleasures of this world. How many trillions of lives have passed over the course of 5700 years having accomplished little else than survival and the enjoyment of some temporal pleasures?

And that includes countless Jews, until they were made to wander — again. In fact, it is amazing how, at the height of material prosperity we tend to fall, and usually in a big way, forced to move on with barely our shirts on our backs. Don't believe me? An exaggeration? Read the book, "Anti-Semitism: The Causes and Effects of a Prejudice", and see how hundreds, if not thousands of times this was the case.

We know it's true. Each time we know it's true. It's just that each time, we hope it won't happen again, and then all of a sudden, one day, we find ourselves wandering once again.

MELAVE MALKAH:

"He said to him, 'I am G-d who brought you out of Ur Kasdim, to give to you this land as an inheritance.'"
(Bereishit 15:7)

The word "place" implies permanence, a place is to stop, to settle down. Thus, Moshe Rabbeinu told Yitro, "You want to stop wandering? Then you have to attach yourself to G-d. The more you attach yourself to G-d, the more you can settle down. The less you attach yourself to G-d, the more you introduce wandering into your life."

It is amazing how many Jews today view Eretz Yisroel materialistically. Some come because they believe they can have a relatively comfortable lifestyle while living in Israel; most don't come because they believe they can't. And when the newspapers publish that there are over 7,000 millionaires in Eretz Yisroel today, there is joy, as if to say, "Eretz Yisroel is finally coming into its own materially."

And then we wonder why there is a sense of wandering even inside the borders of Eretz Yisroel! Yes, there is a time when Eretz Yisroel will be a haven of worldly pleasures, that is, after the Jewish people become more focused on eternal pleasures. Once the Jewish people are prepared to go to "HaMakom", and they cease to be bound up in the pleasures of this world, then the pleasures of this world become theirs on a permanent, eternal basis.

Technically-speaking, there is no reason why Israel today should not be the Hong Kong of the Middle-East. We are living in an age when ideas, as abstract as they may be, can sell for a lot more than actual physical products. A good idea can make a person into a millionaire overnight, and yet, it can take a manufacturer many years to make a million dollars. More good technical ideas come out of this country per capita per year, and the big companies pay big bucks for them. Hence, there are many new millionaires... in the secular community.

Furthermore, if this is really G-d's place, and this is the belief that inspires many ideologists to come eastward from wealthier, more material countries, shouldn't He be taking care of His own? What kind of message does it send back to the rest of the Jews in the Diaspora when jokes circulate like, "How do you make a million dollars in Israel? You come with two million dollars!"

Ha-ha.

Indeed, one rabbi jokingly told a UJA mission that the reason why the Israeli Ministry of Tourism chose a picture of two of the Biblical spies carrying grapes to symbolize their ministry was to act as a warning to tourists: "Remember what happened to the last foreigners who came back home with an evil report about the country! Don't make the same mistake!" Again, ha-ha.

However, as a Jew living in Eretz Yisroel who feels as if he is flourishing spiritually, but who still struggles financially, I have to say that I have this sense of "stability" that I never had while living in the Diaspora with a larger, steady income. I have less material possessions than I did when living in Toronto, but a far greater sense of permanence than when living there. And, I might add, as far as cities in the Diaspora go for living a Torah life, Toronto is still one of the best. I'm not the only one, apparently who feels this way. In fact, even Jews who didn't come looking for that particular form of Torah Judaism, and who happened just to "fall" into it, happily concur, and usually with a sense of awe. There are deep Kabbalistic reasons for the transformation, but the main reason is that they "arrived" at HaMakom, in the realm of the manna, in the world so above the physical reality that one can give up his son and still fulfill the promise made by G-d to continue the legacy through him.

Bound to this world, the possible is possible, and the impossible is impossible. Bound to HaMakom, the temporality of the "corridor" of history is a thing of the past, a step already taken to get to the eternal reality of G-d, Eretz Yisroel, and the manna.

Have a great Shabbat,
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Text

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