

# GO TO THE LAND OF CANAAN

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Dedicated in loving memory of Tuvyah Mendel ben Yisrael Pinchas (Steven Miles Estner), z"l, (Tishrei 30, 5770), a man who felt the pain of the world so acutely it was often difficult for him to bear. - The Estner Family

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*God said to Avram, "Go from your land, your birthplace, and your father's house, to the land which I will show you." (Bereishis 12:1)*

God told Moshe, "Send men to spy out the land of Canaan which I will give to the Children of Israel." (Bamidbar 13:1)

The inherent connection between Parashas Lech-Lecha and Parashas Shlach-Lecha is rarely made, though it goes far beyond their similar sounding names. Though both sound like Divine invitations to enter the Land of Canaan, the former resulted in the end of an exile, whereas the latter resulted in the beginning of one.

There is another important difference as well. In the case of Avraham Avinu and the command of Lech-Lecha, he did not know his final destination at the time, only that he was to leave his homeland and to follow God. In the case of the 12 spies, they knew exactly where they were headed, and according to tradition, they did not follow God, but rather, went on their own and drew their own conclusions.

Hence, Shlach-Lecha is really the reverse of Lech-Lecha, accomplishing the exact opposite of it. And, so fundamental is this difference, and ingrained in the national psyche of the Jewish people, that it is, today, what divides the Jewish people, though many do not see this in terms of how Jews decide today where to take up permanent residence, or why history is going in the direction that it seems to be going.

To appreciate what this means, it is important first to recall the extremely prophetic words of the Malbim, Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel Weiser (1809-1879), zt"l, on the following verse from Yirmiyahu:

*For thus said Hashem: Sing, O Ya'akov, with gladness, exult on the peaks of the nations; announce, laud [God], and say, "O God, save Your people, the remnant of Yisroel!" Behold, I will bring them from the land of the North and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them*

*will be the blind and the lame, the pregnant and birthing together; a great congregation will return here. With weeping they will come and through supplications I will bring them; I will guide them on streams of water, on a direct path in which they will not stumble; for I have been a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn. (Yirmiyahu 31:6-8)*

The Malbim interpreted these verses in the following manner:

At the end of their exile, the oppression will be removed from them, and they will be joyous because they will be on the peak of the nations. The gentiles will give them honor and they will be their heads, instead of being disgraced and lowered amongst them as they were at first. Ya'akov will be the masses of the people, and the lesser amongst them; Yisroel are the great ones. The joyousness from being at the peak of the nations will be Ya'akov's only, and not Yisroel's, because they will want to return His Presence to Tzion. However, at that time they will "announce" and publicly proclaim, and "praise" God when they say, "O God, save Your [righteous] people, the remnant of Yisroel," because they will want the true salvation of the ingathering of the exiles and the return to Tzion. Then it will be like that, that God will return them: Behold, I will bring them. (Malbim, q.v. v'Tzahalu B'Rosh HaGoyim)

Apparently, the Malbim saw that, at the End-of-Days, a division will occur in the Jewish people, but not along traditional lines. The time will come when there will be two camps amongst the Jews, one called "Ya'akov" and the other, "Yisroel," and the difference between the two will be based upon the desire, or lack thereof, to make the move to Eretz Yisroel.

According to the Malbim, it will be the Ya'akov side of the Jewish people -the masses-who will choose to remain in the Diaspora, in spite of the opportunity to return to the land of their fathers, enjoying, instead, acceptance amongst the gentiles and positions of leadership. However, for the Yisroel component of the Jewish nation at this time, this will not be satisfactory, and they will publicly long for the Final Redemption, for the return to Eretz Yisroel of all Jews. And, apparently, this will eventually be a great Kiddush Hashem, and according to the Malbim, what finally triggers the final stages of the Final Redemption.

Before going further, it is important to point out something about the Spies. I have already explained in the past how they came to think that by rejecting the land, they were actually doing the will of God, and avoiding a profanation of the Name of God. That is why, to our surprise, they were so shocked when God didn't buy into their rationale, and chose to eliminate them instead.

The Malbim called them "Ya'akov" and "Yisroel." We can also refer to them as the "Lech-Lecha Club" (referred to hereon as LLC, for "Lech-Lecha Club") of the Jewish people, and the "Shlach-Lecha Club" (referred to hereon as SLC, for "Shlach-Lecha Club"), and before anyone gets hostile, let me point out that entrance to one group or the other does not necessarily depend upon where one is living, but where one's heart lives, in Eretz Yisroel or the Diaspora.

For example, there are people living in the Diaspora who, at this time, can only dream of living in the Holy Land. On the other hand, there are Jews living in Eretz Yisroel who daily plan and plot their departure to live somewhere in the Diaspora, not out of necessity, but out of a fervent desire to leave Eretz Yisroel and live some place else.

There is, I have found as well, a third group. There is a group of Jews, living in the Diaspora, totally committed to the concept of redemption and the ultimate return of the Jewish people to their land, but not now. Whether they can make aliyah today or not, they won't, because they prefer to remain in the Diaspora until Moshiach comes and brings them home. They don't completely reject Eretz Yisroel, only temporarily, for whatever reason.

Since they plan to make aliyah once Moshiach comes, they do not consider themselves to be a "Ya'akov," or a card-carrying member of the SLC, and they remain confident that God will have no complaints against them on their Final Day of Judgment. Relying on personal circumstances, or the words of their leaders, they feel quite comfortable with their lack of yearning for Tzion, and even consider it a mitzvah to stay where they are in the Diaspora.

This week's parshah addresses them, specifically. The reason why Eretz Yisroel is not mentioned to Avraham Avinu because it is more the basis for his personal journey and self-discovery than it is his final destination. While his body journeyed physically in the direction of Canaan, his mind traveled inward, in search of his heart. The test, like all Heavenly tests, was just to reveal to himself where his heart truly rested, and how we felt about leaving his homeland and traveling to Eretz Yisroel was the way to find out.

This is what Moshe Rabbeinu told his father-in-law, Chovev, to try and convince him to stay clear of the SLC, and to move into the LLC. He told him:

*"We are journeying to the place which God said He would give to us. Join us; you will benefit, for God has promised the Jewish people good." (Bamidbar 10:29)*

Like God with respect to Avraham, Moshe did not mention the name of the land to which they were traveling, though everyone knew exactly where they were heading. He was making a point: physical location is secondary to spiritual location, which must always be in Eretz Yisroel, even when being so physically is not possible, and being there when it is.

However, Chovev just didn't get it, answering instead:

*"I will not go, but will instead return to my own land and relatives."*

A familiar line, especially today. The biggest problem with the Spies was not the fear of living in Eretz Yisroel, especially after the comfort and convenience of having miraculously lived in the desert. All changes are difficult and scary, and all beginnings are hard. Their sin was that, even in their hearts,

they didn't want to live in Eretz Yisroel, which had nothing to do with personal circumstances and everything to do with love and appreciation of what matters to God, and what He gives to us.

Lech-Lecha says, "Go to yourself, to your heart, to your heart of hearts, and ask it, 'To whom do you belong?'" Shlach-Lecha, on the other hand, represents a going away from oneself, of becoming detached from one's heart to the extent that even the person himself does not know what he truly feels about different things in life. That is when rationalizations become credible and acceptable in the person's eyes.

Let's take this to a different plane. Let's go beyond the actual physical representations and get to the root ideas themselves, because that is also part of the message of this week's parshah. It will help to explain a lot of inconsistency in the Jewish people, especially with respect to those who profess to be consistent with their Judaism, present company included.

I am, at this time, in the process of finishing my next book, God willing, appropriately titled, "No Such Victim." It is about many ideas, but the underlying point is that we must take responsibility for our own Hashgochah Pratis, that is, Divine Providence. Many things happen to us, and around us, that seem to occur with no perceivable logical reason, meaning, that to us, they are unjust. That makes us, and whoever else is affected, victims.

I wrote the book to show how that cannot be true. In the book, it becomes clear that everything is a function of Divine Providence, nothing is random, everything has a good reason to occur, and that everything is for the good. Just because we can't always see that when we want to does not mean that it is not true, and just because we want answers does not mean that God has to supply them, at least not always on our terms.

I like the book, which has been a very different experience from all of my other books. I believe in the ideas 100 percent, and want to teach them to others. During a writing session, I am usually uplifted by them, and even feel closer to God for having written them.

However, does that stop me from complaining? Not yet. Does it stop me from feeling like a victim when events do not unfold as I plan them? Apparently not. Intellectually, I am behind the book completely, but, apparently, emotionally, I still have a long way to go.

Change is never easy, even "good" change. But, it becomes a lot easier when our heart is into it, and we surrender it to the will of God, and love that which He Himself loves, and cherish that which He Himself cherishes. The journey to find God and to connect to Him is synonymous with the journey to our own heart, for that is, ultimately, where He resides.

And, devoting ourselves to that which He is devoted, every single moment of history, no matter what our personal plans dictate in terms of location and direction, is the way that we make sure that our journey is an inner one, to ourselves and to God, and not an outer one, away from ourselves and away from God. Open your heart and check your card: which club do you belong to?

Text

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