

CHERISH HER DUST

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

And they told him, and said, "We came to the land to which you sent us, and it certainly flows with milk and honey, and this is the fruit of it. However, the people that dwell in the land are fierce ..." (Bamidbar 13:27-28)

Few Parshios get me riled up like this one. This is Parashas Shlach, the story of the Spies and their nation which looked a gift horse in the mouth and rejected it ... the one time that they should have accepted it. Just as the momentary eating from the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah—the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil—cost mankind Paradise until this day, likewise has the momentary rejection of Eretz Yisroel back at our beginning cost us 3,322 years of exile, and counting.

The amazing thing is that, after all that time, we still don't get it. After returning from a recent trip to North America, I can report with accuracy that many Jews in the Diaspora are still unrepentant. I'm not talking about people who can't know better, having been denied the opportunity to connect to Torah and its plans for the Jewish people. I am talking about Jews who should know better, because they are exposed to the national goals of the Jewish people on a daily basis.

It is a remarkable thing, when you think about it. Probably the next U.S. election will be revolve around the borders of Eretz Yisroel. We've already heard from President Obama and his call for the Jewish people to withdraw to the 1967 borders, with what he calls some "land swaps." And, we've already heard the reaction of the pro-Israel lobby calling such a resolution untenable, because of the security needs of the Jewish state.

Not only that, but immediately after the U.S. President went after the borders of Eretz Yisroel, God went after the U.S., sending some pretty wicked tornadoes as far north as Springfield, Michigan. And, if it's not tornadoes, then it's hurricanes, and if it's not hurricanes then it's major flooding. Somehow, every time a American President tries to fool with the boundaries of the Land of Israel America pays a price.

On the other hand, it has been pointed out, the Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper has proven himself to be a staunch ally of the Israeli people. He has bravely stood up to Arab and world pressure, even irking his American neighbor by going against Obama's plan to adjust the borders back to their pre-Six-Day War set-up. Ironically, the financial collapse of 2009 never really touched Canadian real estate the same way that it did in America.

Just a coincidence?

And, it is not just Western countries and leaders who are affected when they tamper with the borders of the Holy Land. It was Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon who pushed to give Gush Katif to the Arabs as part of his unilateral peace initiative. The area promptly became a terrorist haven for Hamas, while Sharon suffered a stroke that immediately left his life in limbo, and his reputation in tatters. He has thus far been denied the chance to become a hero, or to receive a hero's burial.

This is the power of Eretz Yisroel, a tiny little country that, amazingly, literally hinges together two massive continents, South Africa and Euro-Asia (just take a look at a map).

Hence, when the Spies came back with their evil report in this week's parshah, they too had tampered with the borders of Eretz Yisroel. They didn't leak it to the local newspapers, or present it to the U.N. But, when they rejected the land they in fact gave the entire land to the gentile nations that were living there, in effect going even further than most Leftists at this time (who only want to give away enough Jewish land to guarantee complete annihilation of the Jewish State in the next war, God forbid).

As a result, they doomed themselves. By speaking loshon hara about the land, they sealed their own fate. I don't know what they thought would happen to them, but the moment they tinkered with the future of the borders of Eretz Yisroel, so-to-speak, they set themselves up to be recipients of severe Divine punishment, a principle that seems to be built into Creation.

Recently, I was sent an article by someone quoting a so-called rabbi who stated that, as much of a Zionist as he is (which is apparently far less than he seems to think), had he been around when the State was being established, he would have voted against it. And, he is certainly not alone, because there is a whole rabbinical college, either Reform or Conservative, that is teaching its rabbis to be as concerned for Palestinian suffering as Israeli suffering, if not more so.

Noble? No, Erev Rav, as in Mixed Multitude. In our desperation to fit into the gentile world, to become just another member of the family of nations, we create bleeding heart liberals who think that by taking up their position against the Jewish State, we will in fact save it. How mistaken can you be.

And, as if to prove their loyalty to the gentile agenda, they are Jews who turn on their own people. All of a sudden Jews who just want to return to what has always been the Jewish homeland, even when occupied by foreigners, are the enemy. All of a sudden Jews, who sacrificed family members and their own blood in defensive wars, and who want to keep their gains which happen to include Jewish land from the past anyhow, are the pariahs. What an Erev Rav kind of thing to do.

As the Vilna Gaon points out, the last battle of history, for the Jew at least, is against the Erev Rav. And, it is a battle that a Jew cannot sidestep, for doing so, says the GR"A, is to join the ranks of the enemy, not avoid them. And, if that becomes the case, he warns, it is better that a person wasn't

born in the first place. Ouch.

What is this historical battle about? Says the Gaon, it is about the Erev Rav uniting the descendants of Yishmael with the descendants of Eisav in a final battle against the Jewish people. And, it seems, it is battle that takes place over the ownership of Eretz Yisroel, precisely what is happening already. And, their primary means of doing this, explains the GR"A, is trickery and sleight of hand.

This does not mean that they walk out onto a stage, cape, wand, and all, and pull a proverbial rabbit out of their proverbial hats. It means that they walk out onto the international stage, suit, tie, and all, and pull Eretz Yisroel away from the Jews. They expend energy and financial resources to undermine the Jewish right to Jewish land because, they know better than most Jews, that keeping Jews off their land means keeping the redemption off the radar.

Now, the leaders that Moshe Rabbeinu chose to spy the land had clearly been born of traditional stock, and were not from Erev Rav per se. But that does not mean that they had not been affected by the Erev Rav, even in some small way, the net effect being their lack of desire to enter the land and build redemption. That's not a Jewish trait. That's an Erev Rav trait.

True, just as the Talmud distinguishes between someone who breaks the Torah to rebel and someone who breaks it because of unbridled desire, likewise must this discussion make a distinction between Jews who reject the land because they seek to undermine the national goals of the Jewish people, and those who reject it because they're just having too good a time in the Diaspora. There is a fundamental difference between the two groups.

Indeed, the latter group may even dream of making aliyah one day, and some, who can afford it, even have a second home in the Holy Land, visiting it at least once a year, if not more. Furthermore, many of them may even send their children to learn in Israel or on special programs, and support the country in whatever way they can, short of moving in permanently.

The main thing is to do something that shows that one's heart resides in Eretz Yisroel, even if one's body will not. Personally, I tell people, at the very least, open a bank account in Israel and put some money in it on a regular basis, even if only a minimal amount. It is a way of fulfilling the verse:

You will arise and show mercy to Tzion, for the time to favor her, the appointed time will have come. For Your servants desire her stones and cherish her dust. (Tehillim 102:4-15)

And, doing so is extremely important at this time of history, and why the borders of Eretz Yisroel are playing such a prominent role in international politics today. This is not Divine Providence's way of saying that the Land of Israel is not important and irrelevant to the Jewish people at this time, as some would like to think. Rather, it is Divine Providence's way of saying just the opposite, that Eretz Yisroel matters tremendously, and may be the test of our generation.

For we find that every generation has its own unique Divine test, usually with respect to a specific mitzvah. And, what is a test without a struggle? So, therefore, if there is a particular mitzvah with which a particular generation has a particular struggle, we can assume that it is the generation's particular test.

"Ah," but you may say, "who says that living in Eretz Yisroel today is indeed a mitzvah? Are there not many opinions that say just the opposite, that today there is no mitzvah to live in the land of our fathers at this time?"

For the moment, we will bypass the heavyweights who do hold that there is a mitzvah to live on the land today, and certainly one if you are already here. That's an argument for another time, because it is not on that mitzvah that we presently focus, but on one which is clearly a mitzvah according to all opinions. And, if it is not exactly one of the 613 Mitzvos, then it is certainly connected to many of them, if not all of them, on some level, and fulfilling it can be a real life-saver at this precarious point in history.

In fact, read the above verse again more carefully and see what it actually says.

You will arise and show mercy to Tzion ... For Your servants desire her stones and cherish her dust.

Notice how the emphasis in the verse is on cherishing Eretz Yisroel, every aspect of it right down to its dust. That's a mitzvah that is active every conscious moment whether during times of redemption or times of exile. It's that love of the land, which is bound up with the ultimate goals of the Jewish people, that distinguishes a Jew at the end of history, determining whether he is part of the Jewish people or part of the Erev Rav.

For, though making aliyah at this time of history may be optional for some, not wanting to is not an option for any Jew. This is something that cannot be emphasized enough at this late stage of history, and something that so many people take for granted, or do not think about at all. Even Jews who already live in Eretz Yisroel may not cherish the land as much as they ought to, and also have to improve upon this trait. Then, and only then can the generation finally atone for the tragic mistake that the generation of the Spies made in this week's parshah, when, in their hearts, they rejected the land.

Text

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