

# THE TREATY

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

*And he said, "My Lord, God, how can I know that I will inherit it?" (Bereishis 15:8)*

It was a valid question in Avraham's time, and it is a pressing one in ours. It wasn't that Avraham doubted God's promise, but as the Leshem explains, he doubted the Jewish people's ability to remain worthy of the promise down the road.

What about the fact that it says that whatever God promises for good is never rescinded (Brochos 7a)? That, explains the Leshem, is only if the promise is not the reason for the sin, that is, the promise of Eretz Yisroel does not make the Jewish people confident enough to sin, believing that the promise will protect them from expulsion. That would be like saying, "I will sin and Yom Kippur will atone for me" (Yoma 85b).

However, explains the Leshem, if the promise is not the reason for the sin, then the sin cannot cancel the promise for good (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 5, Anaf 4, Siman 4). Hence, God's answer back to Avraham would have been: Sin alone won't cause them to be exiled, unless it is this promise of inheriting the land that will give them the confidence to sin. The Midrash says something similar regarding the Continual Offering the Jewish people used to bring twice a day every day during Temple times. One was brought first thing in the morning to atone for sins committed by the nation during the night, and a second one was brought at dusk to atone for sins committed during the day. If so, the Midrash asks, how could the Jewish people be exiled if they atoned for their sins 24 hours a day, seven days a week?

The answer, of course, is that it was the knowledge that atonement was forthcoming each day that made Jews careless and sinful. Once that was the case, the Continual Offerings no longer worked for the nation, and lacking atonement, the sins just piled up on a daily basis until the land could no longer support the people, and had to spit them out (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:6).

This would help to explain the situation today. Today, in Eretz Yisroel, so many Jews not only do not keep the Torah, they even indulge in activities that the Torah calls abominations. (CBS's "60 Minutes" did a 20 minute spot on Tel Aviv, calling it a "Modern Day Sodom," something with which the people living there seemed to have no problem.)

Yet the land does not spit them out (at least not yet). Indeed, some Jews living there even make it difficult for those who do observe Torah to live according to their traditions. Some despise Torah and

those who learn it, and have gone out of their way to interfere with both, and yet, they remain in Eretz Yisroel living comfortable lives?

Is God just looking the other way? Is this merely a function of hester panim, the hiding of God's face? Or, is it just that the righteous people living on the land are so righteous that they somehow counterbalance the bad these people perpetrate against God and their own people? Perhaps it is a combination of both.

Perhaps. However, the Ramak (Rabbi Moshe Cordevero) explained this anomaly this way:

Anyone who lives in Eretz Yisroel is considered a tzadik even if it doesn't seem to be so. For if he weren't a tzadik, then the land would spit him out, as is written, "And the land shall spit out its inhabitants" (Vayikra 18:25) Therefore, regarding even those who act as evildoers, if they aren't spat out of the land then God calls him a tzadik . . . (Tuv HaAretz, The Advantage of Living in Eretz Yisroel and the Blemish of Living in the Diaspora)

The first time I read this remarkable statement, I immediately thought to myself, "Even the people living here who seem so evil?" The answer to my question came as fast as I thought it:

. . . Even if they are assumed to be evil.

Exclamation Mark! I had never heard that before, and I know from traveling and public speaking that few, if any at all, have heard it as well. What is this remarkable idea based upon, since it seems so counterintuitive from a Torah perspective? The Ramak explains:

This is what is meant by the verse, "This is the Gate of God, the righteous shall enter it" (Tehillim 118:20); the Gate of God, refers to Eretz Yisroel, as we see from Ya'akov Avinu who called it, "the gate of heaven" (Bereishis 28:17). Furthermore, the end of the verse in Tehillim " . . . the righteous will enter it—tzadikim yavo'u vo—" has the first letters spelling tzvi, implying that Eretz HaTzvi is the gate to God and that all those that enter it are called righteous, for once they enter they don't leave. (Tuv HaAretz, The Advantage of Living in Eretz Yisroel and the Blemish of Living in the Diaspora)

If this is true for Jews who are doing what seem like evil deeds, how much more so is this true for Jews who are sincerely trying to serve God to the best of their ability, or even just close to it. How can that be? This is also explained:

. . . If one were to be very precise we would find a statement later in the same Talmud that is seemingly contrary to the above: Rav Elazar says, "All those the dwell in Eretz Yisroel remain without transgression (seemingly even intentional ones), as is said "A dweller of Jerusalem shall not say, 'I am ill,' for the people dwelling there shall be forgiven of sin" (Yeshayahu 33:24). This seems to include even those sins done intentionally! But, how is it possible by merely sitting and doing nothing that you can be granted forgiveness for intentional sins? We can find a solution to this from the Midrash: The verse, "God, You have favored Your land, You have returned the captivity of Ya'akov" (Tehillim 95:2) can best be understood with the aid of the verse, "A land which the Lord,

your God, seeks out . . ." (Devarim 11:12), implying that God seeks out ways and places His eyes upon her, until her actions are deemed pleasing to God. The commandments that are fulfilled there, such as tithing and abiding by the laws of Shmittah, cause God to be pleased with the actions of the Jews (Yalkut Shimoni on Tehillim 115d). Likewise the Torah says, "then the land shall be appeased for its Sabbaticals" (Vayikra 26:34); thus God will be appeased by the land. In other words, what bares the burden of the sins of the land in which they dwell . . . His land . . . carries the burden of those sins. (Tuv HaAretz, The Advantage of Living in Eretz Yisroel and the Blemish of Living in the Diaspora)

This is the real answer that Avraham Avinu needed to hear. God would have told him that even if his descendants did sin, the land had the capacity to atone for their sins. As long as they continued to tithe their produce and observe the Shmittah, and not rely upon the capacity of the land to atone for them, then Eretz Yisroel itself would maintain their merit to keep the land.

However, perhaps this is not what concerned Avraham Avinu. Perhaps what concerned him was how they would get into the land in the first place. Once there, the land would atone for all sins, but to get there in the first place if they were already sinners might have been a different story, as the Ramak adds:

This is the opposite to those that arrive in Eretz Yisrael and don't pay attention to the fact that they are living in the palace of the King. They who are rebellious, transgressing, and abound in their drunkenness and feasts of vanity, frivolity, emptiness and hedonism, are described by the following verse, "But you came and contaminated My land, and made My heritage into an abomination" (Yirmiyahu 2:7). The verse, "When you come up to appear before Me, who sought this from your hands to trample in My courtyards" (Yeshayahu 1:12), also applies to them. These people shouldn't deceive themselves into thinking that they will remain in the Holy Land after their deaths. Rather even in their death they shall be cast out of the land like dogs, as it says: "The souls of all evildoers who die in Eretz Yisroel will be cast out to the Diaspora" as is written in the verse, 'He shall cast out the soul of your enemy as a stone is shot out of a slingshot' (Shmuel 1:25:29). For in the future God will grasp the corners of the land, and will shake off all contamination to the Diaspora, as is written, 'To grasp the edges of the earth, and shake the wicked from it' (Iyov 38:13) (Pirkei D'Rebbi Eliezer, Ch. 33) . . . Therefore, any person coming to Eretz Yisroel should tremble upon his arrival to the Land, and should resolve himself to be doubly fearful of heaven than how he was in the Diaspora, and constantly be cognizant of his dwelling in the King's palace. (Tuv HaAretz, The Advantage of Living in Eretz Yisroel and the Blemish of Living in the Diaspora)

Hence God showed him, through prophecy, that no matter what, his descendants would inherit the land. And, we have learned that as long as we don't rely upon our Divine right to the land to sin, the land will atone for our sins, so that we can keep it. So it was promised. So it has been. So it shall remain to be.

Text

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Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's [online book store](#) for more details! [www.thirtysix.org](http://www.thirtysix.org)