

Masai and Devarim 5781

BS"D Parashat Masai and Devarim 5781

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Denying Jewish Inheritance

An unscrupulous lawyer was instructed by a secretly wealthy client that, only after his death, should his son be informed of the fortune that his father had accumulated and bequeathed to him as an inheritance. The father passed away, but the lawyer never informed the son of the vast treasure that was his.

What can one say regarding the conduct of this lawyer who withheld from the son what was his rightful possession? Please use moderation when expressing your expletives.

An Un-Jewish Request?

There is something amiss in the request of the tribes of Reuven and Gad to relinquish their tribal homesteads in the west bank of the Jordan River, where the other eleven tribes would be settling, in favor of the pasture lands conquered from Sichon and Og in the areas east of the Jordan.

What happened to the dream of reaching the Holy Land, whose more sanctified districts were to the west of the Jordan, and after suffering the hardships of 40 years in the desert for it? Why did they barter away their superior homesteads for grazing lands?

I offer the following reason for this strange and even "un-Jewish" request.

That Moshe was prohibited from crossing the Jordan River was no secret. The tribes knew that, after seven years of conflict against the 31 Canaanite city-states in the western part of the land and an additional seven years of apportioning the individual parcels of land, the agricultural laws (tithes, Sabbatical Year, etc.) would come into effect. However, this could only be valid in the areas of the Holy Land which were officially settled by a tribe through the halachic process (including lottery or drawing of lots) and directed by Yehoshua Bin Nun and Elazar ben Aharon the Kohen Gadol.

In other words, if no tribe were to settle the eastern bank of the Jordan, then that area would be halachically inferior in some way to the apportioned areas to the west in terms of many halachot.

In their minds, it was inconceivable that Moshe Rabbeinu, the pre-eminent master of Torah and the binding force between our Father in heaven and the Jewish nation, would be buried outside of the major sanctified areas of the land – in an halachically inferior part of the land.

Under the pretext of the necessity for grazing lands, the tribes of Reuven and Gad planned to populate the areas in the east of the Jordan with their people. In this way, they would draw the sanctity of the west bank to the east and provide Moshe Rabbeinu with the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael, all the while abiding by HaShem's decree that Moshe could not pass over to the west bank of the Jordan.

An ingenious plan indeed. Moshe ascended Mount Nevo in the area allotted to the tribe of Reuven, and then HaShem moved his body to the deep gorge in the tribal area of Gad.

Denying the Inheritance of Jews

To our great sorrow, we are witnessing a phenomenon in the United States diametrically opposed to the spirit and the law

of what motivated the tribes of Reuven and Gad – and later to include half the tribe of Menashe. Wannabe “poskim” are dissociating the Holy Land from the possession of good and trusting Jews by declaring that one should not go on aliya. This is in stark contrast to what the tribes of Reuven and Gad did by bringing the Holy Land into the “possession” of Moshe Rabbeinu.

Despite all the miracles we have experienced here in the Holy Land, there are still contemporary spiritual leaders in the galut who disseminate their “halachic” decisions that Jews must wait patiently in the galut – and suffer whatever might come upon them – until the Mashiach appears.

Many rabbinic sources state that just as every Jew has his place in the World-to-Come, so too does every Jew have a part in Eretz Yisrael (including the tribe of Levi). So, by depriving a Jew from his innate possession, these rabbinic figures are no different than the lawyer I wrote about above.

I once met a survivor who told me that whoever was in Bergen Belsen for 10 minutes, can justifiably say Hallel every day in Medinat Yisrael.

HaShem's Choice

Bereishiet 17,8:

וְאֵלֶיךָ אֶפְתָּה אֶת-אֲרָצְךָ וְאֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְאֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

I will give to you and to your descendants after you where you now reside as a foreigner, the whole land of Canaan as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

And Rashi explains the phrase “and I will be their God”:

וְאֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל – וְאֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וְאֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

“And there (in Eretz Yisrael) I shall be their God. However, a Jew who (willingly) lives in chutz la’aretz (out of Eretz Yisrael) is as if he is without HaShem”.

The “Siftei Chachamim” (an explanatory commentary on Rashi authored by Harav Shabbetai Bass) notes:

הא"י חסדו ורחמיו רבים על ישראל וכל מי שחוצה לארץ ישראל
הוא כמי שאין לו שם שמים וכל מי שחוצה לארץ ישראל
הוא כמי שאין לו שם שמים

Eretz Yisrael is HaShem’s (personal) domain which He chose for Himself, while all the lands outside of Eretz Yisrael Hashem relegated to Ministers (heavenly entities, like angels). Therefore, whoever lives in chutz la’aretz is as if he consciously and premeditatedly removed himself from HaShem’s guidance (authority), as it were.

In conclusion, Eretz Yisrael is not a game. It is a major factor in deciding where one’s place will be when his life is terminated in this world.

Have a meaningful fast. It might be the last time we fast on Tisha b’Av, which according to the prophet Zecharya will eventually turn into a day of joy.

Shabbat Shalom,

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