

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Acharei Mos 5768

And you shall keep My laws and My ordinances, and you shall not do any of these abominations, both the native and the proselyte who dwells in your midst, for the people of the land before you did all these abominations, and the land was defiled; and let not the land vomit you out when you defile it, as it vomited out the nation before you. (18:26-28)

When Rabbi Itzeleh Peterburger (1837-1907) arrived in the Holy Land in 1904, he delivered a speech at a reception organized for him in the port city of Jaffa. In his speech, he posed the following question. G-d accused the Jewish people: "You came and defiled My land, and My property you made into an abomination" (Yirmiyahu 2:7). The Midrash (Yalkut on Eichah 3:20) sees a positive side in this verse: "Said the Holy One, blessed is He: If only the children of My people would be in Eretz Yisroel, even if they defile it!" From this it would seem that it is better for irreligious Jews to live in Eretz Yisroel than elsewhere in the world. But the Torah says clearly in Parshas Acharei Mos that Jews who do not keep the laws of the Torah will be vomited out of Eretz Yisroel.

He answered that indeed, G-d wishes, as it were, that the sinners could stay in Eretz Yisroel even while defiling it. But they cannot, because the land will vomit them out. (Mishulchan Gavoah, p. 152)

Reb Itzeleh's words leave us with the question: G-d can do anything He wishes, so if He causes Eretz Yisroel to vomit out sinners, He must want them out. Why then does He say He wishes they could stay? The answer is that G-d wants Eretz Yisroel to be a holy land, conducive to His service. The holiness of the land precludes the possibility of sinners living there. Were they to stay, the land could influence them to become better and please G-d, but then the holiness of the land would be compromised, and G-d wants it to remain holy.

Today there are unfortunately many sinners in Eretz Yisroel, yet it does not vomit them out. This can be explained based on the words of the Alshich in his commentary on the Torah. The Torah first says, "And you shall keep..." using the plural for "you", indicating that all Jews must keep the laws. But the end of the verse is "both the native and the proselyte..." meaning that every single Jew has the responsibility to keep the laws, even if the majority of the Jews do not. When the Canaanites inhabited the land, although only the "people" - i.e. powerful people - did the abominations, they were all vomited out. But with the Jews, the Torah promises, that will not be the case. "The land will not vomit you out in the same way it vomited out the nation before you." When the Jews inhabit the land, if they all sin, they will be vomited out, but as long as there are a few who do not sin, they will not be expelled; those who sin will be "cut off from their people" as the Torah continues (v. 29).

The same statement was made by the Brisker Rav, quoting the Netziv: "The reason why Eretz Yisroel does not vomit out the sinners is because its nature is to vomit out all its inhabitants at once, and thus it would have to vomit out even the Torah Jews. So everyone is saved in the merit of the Torah Jews."

The Brisker Rav continued, "The Zionists take credit for protecting the Jews in the Holy Land with their military might. This is similar to the false prophet described in the Torah (Devarim 13:2) who claims to

have received a prophecy that Jews should worship idols, and brings a miracle as proof of his authenticity. The Torah says that despite the miracle, we must not listen to him, for "Hashem your G-d is testing you." Our Sages say, "Even if he makes the sun stop in the sky." G-d may cause the sun to stop in the sky one day, and the prophet will claim that this unusual event is connected with him, but in reality there is no connection. The imagined connection is a test from G-d. Here too, the seeming connection between the Zionists and the survival of the Jews in the Holy Land is but a test from G-d, and in reality the Jews are saved in the merit of those faithful to the Torah among them."

"Any miracles in Eretz Yisroel in our time were not done for the Zionists, as if G-d desires the existence of their state and their army. People say that the state is a place of refuge for the Jewish people, but that is false. The state is a great misfortune for the Jewish people, and no one knows what will be in the end. Our prayer is

that we be saved through the kindness of G-d from all the dangers threatening us from inside and outside, without any connection to the Zionists and their state. G-d forbid that we should pray for their success in their wars."

The Brisker Rav gave an analogy: "A mother washed her young child and dressed him in his finest Shabbos clothes, and then he went stomping in the mud puddles. When he came home, his mother, in her love and mercy, washed him again and put clean clothes on him. Then the foolish child went and bragged to his friends about his greatness, his success, his wisdom and his power, showing them the beautiful new clothes he had received. Here too, how foolish are those who got themselves into deep mud, pulling all the Jews of the Holy Land after them into terrible danger, and then when G-d has mercy and they are saved, they take credit for the saving, as if G-d did miracles for their sake!" (Uvdos Vehanhagos Leveis Brisk, v. 3 p. 50)

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