

Lessons from Parshat Nitzavim

Lesson one: Israel/ Zionism

21 And a later generation, your descendants, who will rise after you, **along with the foreigner who comes from a distant land**, will say, upon seeing the plagues of that land and the diseases with which the Lord struck it:

כא ואמר הדור האחרון בְּנֵיכֶם
אשר יקומו מאחריכם והנכרי
אשר יבא מארץ רחוקה וראו
את־מכות הארץ ההוא
ואת־תחלואיה אשר־חלה ה' בה:

22 Sulfur and salt have burned up its entire land! It cannot be sown, nor can it grow [anything], not [even] any grass will sprout upon it. It is like the overturning of Sodom, Gemorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the Lord overturned in His fury and in His rage.

כב גפרית ומלח שרפה כל־ארצה
לא תזרע ולא תצמח ולא־יעלה
בה כל־עשב כמהפכת סדם
ועמרה אדמה וצבויים אשר הפך
ה' באפו ובחמתו:

23 And all the nations will say, Why did the Lord do so to this land? What [is the reason] for this great rage of fury?

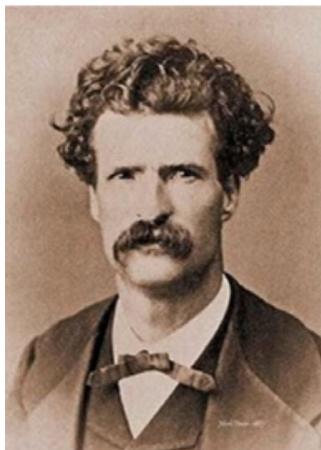
כג ואמרו כל־הגוים על־מה עשה
ה' נכה לארץ הזאת מה חרי
הארץ הגדול הזה:

24 Then they will say, It is because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord, God of their fathers, [the covenant] which He made with them when He took them out of the land of Egypt,

כד ואמרו על אשר עזבו
את־ברית ה' אלהי אבותם אשר
כרת עמם בהוציאן אתם מארץ
מצרים:

<http://www.literaturepage.com/read/twain-innocents-abroad-457.html>

"Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes. Over it broods the spell of a curse that has withered its fields and fettered its energies. Where Sodom and Gomorrah reared their domes and towers, that solemn sea now floods the plain, in whose bitter waters no living thing exists -- over whose waveless surface the blistering air hangs motionless and dead -- about whose borders nothing grows but weeds, and scattering tufts of cane, and that treacherous fruit that promises refreshment to parching lips, but turns to ashes at the touch. Nazareth is forlorn; about that ford of Jordan where the hosts of Israel entered the Promised Land with songs of rejoicing, one finds only a squalid camp of fantastic Bedouins of the desert; Jericho the accursed, lies a moldering ruin, today, even as Joshua's miracle left it more than three thousand years ago.... Renowned Jerusalem itself, the stateliest name in history, has lost all its ancient grandeur, and is become a pauper village; the riches of Solomon are no longer there to compel the admiration of visiting Oriental queens; the wonderful temple which was the pride and the glory of Israel, is gone. The noted Sea of Galilee, where Roman fleets once rode at anchor was long ago deserted by the devotees of war and commerce, and its borders are a silent wilderness; Capernaum is a shapeless ruin; Magdala is the home of beggared Arabs. Palestine is desolate and unlovely. And why should it be otherwise? Can the curse of the Deity beautify a land? "



Mark Twain in 1867, the year of his trip to the Holy Land. Lib of Congress Photo

Ramba”n

Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, Nachmanides (1194-1270), fled Christian Spain for the Land of Israel. After a long and perilous journey, Nachmanides arrived at the Port of Acre before travelling to Jerusalem in 1267, where he couldn't even find nine other Jews to pray with. He wrote to his son,

"Many are Israel's forsaken places, and great is the desecration. The more sacred the place, the greater the devastation it has suffered. Jerusalem is the most desolate place of all."

...And the fruits of the land, a pride and adornment ([Yeshayahu 4:2](#)) Its fruit and produce are plentiful; It is still a land that flows With milk and honey for its dwellers! I have likened you, my mother, To a woman in birth whose child died in her lap. The milk in her breasts causes her pain, And so she gives suck to the pups of dogs. And with all this, "Your lovers despise you" ([Yirmeyahu 4:30](#)), And your enemies find you desolate... "And the forsaken places are many In the midst of the fat and large land" ([Nechemya 9:35](#)) For they are not befitting you, Nor are you fit for them...

Leviticus 26, 32

31 I will lay your cities waste and make your holy places desolate, and I will not partake of your pleasant fragrances.

לֹא וְנִתְּתִי אֶת־עָרֵיכֶם
חֲרָבָה וְהִשְׁמֹתִי
אֶת־מִקְדָּשֵׁיכֶם וְלֹא אֶרְיֵחַ
בְּרֵיחַ נִחְחֶכֶם:

32 So devastated will I leave the land, that your enemies who live there will be astonished... Your land will remain desolate, and your cities in ruins.

לֵב וְהִשְׁמֹתִי אֲנִי
אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְשָׁמְמוּ עָלֶיהָ
אֲיִבֵיכֶם הַיֹּשְׁבִים בָּהּ:

Nachmanides on this verse:

That which God states here, "So devastated will I leave the land that your enemies..." constitutes a good tiding, proclaiming that during all our exiles, our land will not accept our enemies. This is a great proof and assurance to us, for in the entire inhabited world one cannot find such a good and large land which was always lived in, and yet is as ruined as it is [today]. For since the time that we left it, it has not accepted any nation or people, and they all try to settle it, but to no avail.

1917-
1967-

Sherif Hussein, the guardian of the Islamic Holy Places in Arabia:

The resources of the country are still virgin soil and will be developed by the Jewish immigrants. One of the most amazing things until recent times was that the Palestinian used to leave his country, wandering over the high seas in every direction. His native soil could not retain a hold on him, though his ancestors had lived on it for 1000 years. At the same time, we have seen the Jews from foreign countries streaming to Palestine from Russia, Germany, Austria, Spain, America. The cause of causes could not escape those who had a gift of deeper insight. They knew that the country was for its original sons (abna'ihilasliyin), for all their differences, a sacred and beloved homeland. The return of these exiles (jaliya) to their homeland will prove materially and spiritually [to be] an experimental school for their brethren who are with them in the fields, factories, trades and in all things connected with toil and labor.

(Samuel Katz, *Battleground — Fact and Fantasy in Palestine*, p. 126)

Leviticus 26

32 I will make the Land desolate, so that it will become desolate [also] of your enemies who live in it.

I will make the Land desolate: This is actually a good thing for Israel, namely, that since the Land will be desolate of people living in it, the enemies will not find contentment in Israel's Land [and will have to leave]. — [Sifthei Chachamim; Torah Kohanim 26:38]

33 And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you. Your land will be desolate, and your cities will be laid waste.

And you, I will scatter among the nations: This [though,] is a harsh thing [for Israel], for when the people of a country are exiled to the same place, they see each other and find solace. However, Israel was scattered as if through a winnowing basket, just as a person who scatters barley through a sieve [so that] not one of them is attached to another. — [Torath Kohanim 26: 39]

34 Then, the land will be appeased regarding its sabbaticals. During all the days that it remains desolate while you are in the land of your enemies, the Land will rest and thus appease its sabbaticals.

Then, the Land will be appeased: Then, the Land will be appeased, and in turn,] appease the anger of the Omnipotent, Who had been angry regarding the Land's Shemittah years (Mizrachi) [and thus appease [God regarding them].

לִבְּיָדֵי אֹיְבֵיכֶם הַיֹּשְׁבִים בָּהּ:
וְהַשְׁמַתִּי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְשָׁמְמוּ עָלֶיהָ

והשמתי אני את הארץ: זו מדה טובה לישראל שלא ימצאו האויבים נחת רוח בארצם, שתהא שוממה מיושביה:

וְהִיְתָה אֶרְצְכֶם שְׁמֵמָה וְעַרְיָכֶם יְהִיוּ חָרְבָה:
וְאֶתְכֶם אֶזְרָה בְּגוֹיִם וְהִרִיקְתִּי אַחֲרֵיכֶם חָרֵב

ואתכם אזרה בגוים: זו מדה קשה, שבשעה שבני מדינה גולים למקום אחד רואים זה את זה ומתנחמין, וישראל נזרו כבמזרה, כאדם הזורה שעורים בנפה ואין אחת מהן דבוקה בחברתה:

וְהָרַצְתָּ אֶת־שַׁבְּתֹתֶיהָ:
וְאִזְ תִּרְצָה הָאָרֶץ אֶת־שַׁבְּתֹתֶיהָ כָּל יְמֵי הַשְּׁמָה וְאַתֶּם בְּאֶרֶץ אֹיְבֵיכֶם אִזְ תִּשְׁבֹּת הָאָרֶץ

אז תרצה: תפייס את כעס המקום שכעס על שמטותיה:

[35](#) It will rest during all the days that it remains desolate, whatever it had not rested on your sabbaticals, when you lived upon it.

whatever it had not rested on your sabbaticals: The seventy years of the Babylonian exile [i.e., between the destruction of the first Temple and the building of the second,] corresponded to the seventy years of Shemittah and Jubilee years that took place during the years that Israel angered the Omnipresent while in their Land, [a total of] 430 years. Three hundred and ninety years were the years of their sinning from when they entered the land until the Ten Tribes were exiled, and the people of Judah angered Him for forty more years from the time the Ten Tribes were exiled until the destruction of Jerusalem.

לֹא־נִשְׁבְּתָהּ בְּשַׁבְּתֵיכֶם בְּשַׁבְּתֵיכֶם עָלֶיהָ:
לֵב כָּל־יְמֵי הַשְּׁמִי תִשְׁבֶּת אֶת אֲשֶׁר

את אשר לא שבתה: שבעים שנה של גלות בבל הן היו כנגד שבעים שנות השמטה ויובל שהיו בשנים שהכעיסו ישראל בארצם לפני מקום ארבע מאות ושלשים שנה. שלש מאות ותשעים היו שני עונם משנכנסו לארץ עד שגלו עשרת השבטים, ובני יהודה הכעיסו לפניו ארבעים שנה משגלו עשרת השבטים עד חרבות ירושלים,

Rav Samson raphael Hirsch:

Just as *shemitta* and *yovel* are supposed to express homage to God in the life of the country, and to give light amidst the nations even faraway, so too, the desolation of the Land of Israel expresses homage to God. God warns of it in advance, and He carries out the decree which He ordained long ago. The desolation of the land continues throughout all the hundreds of years of our exile, until this very day. The desolation is a large exclamation mark in God's book of history, attesting that the land is God's and that He expects his Torah to be observed in the land.

Lesson two: Closing two circles- Genesis and Exodus

Deutoronomy 30, 18- 20

18 I declare to you this day, that you will surely perish, and that you will not live long days on the land, to which you are crossing the Jordan, to come and take possession thereof.

יה הגדתי לכם היום כי אבד תאבדון
לא-תאריכון ימים על-האדמה אשר
אתה עבר את-הירדן לבוא שמה
לרשתה:

19 This day, I call upon the heaven and the earth as witnesses [that I have warned] you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. You shall choose life, so that you and your offspring will live;

ט העדתי בכם היום את-השמים
ואת-הארץ החיים והמות נתתי לפניך
הברכה והקללה ובררת בחיים למען
תחיה אתה ונרצעה:

20 To love the Lord your God, to listen to His voice, and to cleave to Him. For that is your life and the length of your days, to dwell on the land which the Lord swore to your forefathers to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob to give to them.

כ לאהבה את-ה' אלהיך לשמע בקולו
וילדבקה-בו כי הוא חייך וארדך ימיך
לשבת על-האדמה אשר נשבע ה'
לאבותיך לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב לתת
להם:

9 And the Lord God caused to sprout from the ground every tree pleasant to see and good to eat, and the Tree of Life in the midst of the garden, and the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil.

ט וַיִּצְמַח ה' אֱלֹהִים מִן־הָאֲדָמָה
כָּל־עֵץ נֹחַמֵד לְמִרְאָה וְטוֹב
לְמֵאֲכָל וְעֵץ הַחַיִּים בְּתוֹךְ הַגֶּן וְעֵץ
הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע:

16 And the Lord God commanded man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat.

טז וַיִּצְוֶה ה' אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָדָם
לֵאמֹר מִכָּל עֵץ־הַגֶּן אָכַל תֹּאכַל:

17 But of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat of it, for on the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die."

יז וַיֹּמַעַץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע לֵאמֹר
תֹּאכַל מִכָּל עֵץ־הַגֶּן אָכַלְהָ מִמֶּנּוּ מוֹת
תָּמוּת:

Exodus

Midrash Tanchuma Deuteronomy

(Deut. 1:1:) “These are the words that Moses spoke....” Israel said, “Yesterday you said (in Exod. 4:10), ‘I am not a man of words.’ And now you are speaking so much?” Rabbi Isaac said, “If you are impeded in your speech, recite the Torah and you will be healed, [as] Moshe already studied all of the Torah.”

Rabbi Sacks ZT”L Chukat (5773)

The remarkable fact about Moses and the rock is the way he observes precedent. Almost forty years earlier, in similar circumstances, God had told him to take his staff and strike the rock. Now too, God told him to take his staff. Evidently, Moses inferred that he was being told to act this time as he had before, which is what he does. He strikes the rock. What he failed to understand was that time had changed in one essential detail. He was facing a new generation. The people he confronted the first time were those who had spent much of their lives as slaves in Egypt. Those he now faced were born in freedom in the wilderness. There is one critical difference between slaves and free human beings. Slaves respond to orders. Free people do not. They must be educated, informed, instructed, taught – for if not, they will not learn to take responsibility