

Between Destruction and Redemption

by Dr. Meir Tamari

Just as individuals have personalities and a story of how these personalities were formed, so too do nations. Academic disciplines have been built to research and understand the history of nations and many theories built around them. Karl Marx, communists and many socialists saw the class struggle as the factor behind international, national and personal histories. Likewise, there is the widespread school of "all is accident, or personalities or pure chance." However, the story of Israel is radically different from all of them in that all history flows from the Hashem-Israel relationship: according to their observance of His Way, parnasa, wealth, health, success and power flow. By the same measure rebellion, negligence, idolatry, bloodshed and immorality bring sorrow, suffering, poverty, persecution and galut.

The formula popularly suggested for ending the negative results is simple. Do teshuva; end galus etc. Our parsha suggests that there may be more to it than that when it writes, "I will remember my Yaakov-covenant, my Yitzchok-covenant and also my Avraham covenant, and I will remember the Land." There are 3 different covenants, each one bearing the name of one of the Avot, and following the contours of the life of the person for whom it was named.

Avraham stood alone against the

positions and feelings of an entire world. Yet he was not molested or persecuted for his differences, rather he was accepted as "a prince of G-d". His material success was not met with the jealousy of others, and he was permitted to speak his mind in calling on all to serve the One G-d. Yitzchak also did well, but his message engendered jealousy and hostility. He was not openly opposed, but his rejection by others meant that he was forced into a life of isolation, living without closeness to others, but making his own family his world. Yaakov's life was a succession of struggles; Maariv, which he instituted, was emblematic of the darkness of his life punctuated only by brief periods of full contentment and happiness. Israel's history too would not follow a single path. National settlement in Eretz Yisrael was twice interrupted by Galuyot which themselves led us down different paths. Each of those paths and its life-patterns is part of a separate covenant. The Jewish people would need to experience and develop according to that particular covenant while Hashem stood by them through the trials and tribulations that each would bring. Thereby they would be able to move from one to another and successfully navigate the challenges of each of them. So they would be ready for the next set of circumstances till the final covenant, that of the end of the pasuk.

When the Jews are able to demonstrate that Man can utilize G-d's blessings to him entirely for positive purposes, their true mission will dawn upon the nations. They will realize that Klal

Yisrael had been entrusted millennia earlier with Hashem's Torah in order so that they should take it forth into history and into the world, and eventually enrich all of mankind through it. Then the tripartite galus could come to an end, and Hashem's people could return to their Land in peace and tranquility. Upon that special land, they would demonstrate the beauty of living according to G-d's plan in the physical environment most conducive to wringing the most meaning out of the mitzvot - the holy Land of Israel" (Rabbi S. R. Hirsch).

These covenants apply to the individuals no less than to the nation as we learn from the discussion between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai regarding the verse; "Of old the earth's foundation You laid, and the work of Your hands is the heavens.' Bet Shammai taught, 'the heavens were created first', while Bet Hillel taught, 'the earth was created first'. Rabbi Yochanan in the name of the Sages taught, 'In creation the heavens came first but in improvement the earth had precedence.' Rabbi Elazar the son of Rabbi Shimon said, 'Although my father taught that they were created simultaneously, but still sometimes the heavens are mentioned first and at other times the earth is mentioned first, that shows that they are equal.' Beit Shammai who taught that the heavens were created first, believe that only if one first uses the brain and wisdom can one understand the greatness of G-d, the wisdom of His works and subject themselves to Him. Beit Hillel believe that one should commence with the broken heart,

otherwise reliance on the mind and wisdom could lead one to arrogance, to pride and to chutzpa.

"It would seem that the halacha is in accordance with Rabbi Yochanan in the name of the Sages, who said that first the creation was of heaven but the improvement, purification and finesse was of the earth. So, the beginning of the way to G-d is through the mind and through wisdom, while it has to be refined and improved through the heart" (Shem MiShmuel). 🌸