



RABBI MOSHE

TARAGIN

Ram, Yeshivat Har Eztion

Geulas Yisrael The Beast in the Jungle

In his closing speech, Moshe forecasts the inevitable conquest of the Land of Israel. Their upcoming military victories will be achieved through supernatural assistance, including an extraordinary “new” weapon - a terrifying wasp dispatched by G-d to eliminate enemies of Jewish destiny.

Yet, despite the miraculous nature of their anticipated triumphs, Moshe warns that the pace of settlement will unexpectedly drag. He cautions that the entire Land of Israel won't be rapidly settled, as this would invite the threat of “wild animals”. Too quick a conquest would expose the frontier and its pioneers to attacks by wild beasts. By capturing the Land in stages, the frontier can be tamed, and the settlements can be stabilized. Moshe's concern about the wild animals of the jungle seems bizarre in light of the spectacular miracles in Egypt. Presumably, the same G-d who dispatched “arov” beasts to ravage Egypt was also capable of protecting the Jewish frontiersmen. If G-d is capable of unleashing murder hornets, he can certainly curb wild animals on the frontier. Why is the pace of settling Israel decelerated by the

fear of wild beasts?

Evidently, G-d desires that the Land of Israel be settled through human process and be subjected to the conventions of man. For humans to “own” the process of settling Israel, they must acquire the Land through work, toil, and labor. A ‘magic show’ of miracles cannot create a permanent and lasting national presence. The struggle to carve out the frontier and fortify cities against the hazards of the wild is always a seminal national experience which frames that nation's ethos. Without this formative experience on mountains, swamplands and prairies, the Land of Israel will feel “supernaturally gifted” and more like a tenuous fantasy rather than an enduring kingdom. Without a sense of personal and national accomplishment, our commitment to the Land –especially during potential periods of crisis – would be fragile and fleeting. The deliberate pace of settling the Land allows a deeper sense of identification with a Land tamed through human spirit and national effort.

Not surprisingly, we have encountered a similar gradual “pace” in our modern attempts to return to Israel. Though the process feels supremely Divine, the pace feels maddeningly human. We haven't secured universal international recognition, nor have we inspired the entire Jewish world to return. Yet, despite the frustrating nature of this preliminary phase of

redemption, the struggle amplifies the “human element” of our historical partnership with God. Wrestling with various forms of ‘beasts of the field’ bonds us to our Land and enhances our level of identification. As “empowered partners” we identify more deeply with the process than we might have, as passive beneficiaries of a meteoric Divine revolution.

There is an additional benefit to the staggered process, beyond generating greater “ownership” of the redemptive process. The gradual pace allows us to better “acclimate” to this revolution of history. Thousands of years ago, the gradual pace of settling Israel allowed the young nation to “process” the historical import of life in Israel, as well as the Divine demands incumbent upon them. These weighty expectations aren’t immediately or easily comprehended, and a gradual entry enables a more deliberate process of internalization. It isn’t merely the “darkness of the jungle” which dictated a slower pace of settlement but also the “cloudy inner uncertainty” of a nation beckoned to glory, but requiring time to fully grasp their great mission.

The staggered pace of our modern return to the State of Israel has also allowed our generation to process the meaning of this great historical shift. That original generation required time to ponder a 250-year absence from Israel. We have returned after a 2000-year absence journeying along a chaotic road home. There are so many questions which require consideration and closure. Why did this prolonged Exile last 2000 years? Why were Jews so persecuted and discriminated against? How did we

survive without the classic cultural elements of flag, land, coin and army? How does our success over the past two millennia impact our relationship with God and, in particular, the tonality of our prayer? How can we expand the fabric of religious experience into the spheres of nationhood without diluting the inner core of ritual and religion? How to bridge between tradition and revolution? Without creating moral or historical parity between the Holocaust and the State of Israel, how do we explain the implausible juxtaposition of these two events in a three-year time span?

We have so many issues to process and so many questions to face. Returning home isn’t merely geographical or political – it is “introspectional”- on both an individual and collective level. Without clarifying some of these questions, our bodies may inhabit the Land but our imaginations and souls are still restless. Perhaps, our generation, has been afforded an opportunity to acclimate to these great events and process the great odyssey of Jewish history. We too, have many “beasts of the field” to tame- our actual enemies, as well as our own “inner beasts”- the burning questions which still haunt our national conscience. We still yearn for a lightning-fast overhaul of history and a rapid return to our lost glory. Without question, the power of such an experience and the potency of Divine revelation will turn hearts, settle our souls and resolve any lingering questions. Until that moment, we value the time and the opportunity to distill our experience, ponder the revolution and hopefully achieve clarity and closure. Take the time to ponder redemption. There is a lot to process! ■