

## Parshas Breishis 5763

It's always a good idea to start off best foot forward. People always try to make a good first impression; authors polish the first chapter of their book so the reader will want to read on. Yet, surprisingly, Rashi begins his פירוש with one of the most difficult and perplexing comments in his entire oeuvre: אמר ר' יצחק etc.

Very difficult: First, let's grant that this explains why the Torah had to tell the story of creation. But it still doesn't explain why we needed the rest of Breishis, and the beginning of Shmos?

Furthermore, the objection of the nations of the world doesn't seem to make any sense. The כנענים weren't the first possessors of Eretz Yisrael. We know from Rashi in לך לך, on the pasuk והכנעני אז בארץ, it was the children of שם who first settled א"י, and the כנענים conquered it from them. So how that there be an objection to our conquering it from them?

And anyway, isn't that the way of the world? What people have lived in their land from time immemorial? So why should we be different?

Simple answer: Double standard.

**Eric Hoffer wrote in 1968:**

**The Jews are a peculiar people: things permitted to other nations are forbidden to the Jews. Other nations drive out thousands, even millions of people and there is no refugee problem. Russian did it, Poland and Czechoslovakia did it, Turkey threw out a million Greeks, and Algeria a million Frenchman. Indonesia threw out heaven knows how many Chinese – and no one says a word about refugees. But in the case of Israel the displaced Arabs have become eternal refugees...**

**Other nations when victorious on the battlefield dictate peace terms. But when Israel is victorious it must sue for peace. Everyone expects the Jews to be the only real Christians in this world.**

OK, we're לסטים, but you claim to be different. לסטים אתם, you're just like us!

More deeply:

There is a fundamental difference between the way in which ארץ ישראל belongs to us, and the way in which other countries belong to other people. The Celts owned England only until the Saxons conquered them; and the Saxons until the Normans came. No one would suggest that we should give it back to the Celts. Nor does anyone seriously think that we should give America back to the Indians.

But ארץ ישראל belongs to us in a different way. It is ours intrinsically. Even after we were driven into גלות it remained ours: גלינו מארצנו, but it remains ארצנו. No other people could make ארץ ישראל theirs; ארץ ישראל wouldn't let them. On the one hand, זו מידה טובה לישראל שלא ימצאו האויבים נחת רוח - פסוק Rashi says: ושממו עליה אויביכם - פסוק, because it could never become theirs.

And therefore the nations say: לסטים אתם. Every other country is the common property of mankind, held by whomever conquered it last. But ארץ ישראל was removed from the rest of mankind, and made uniquely yours. By what right?

And the answer is: ברצונו נתן לנו, When הקב"ה created the world, He created it for all mankind, but He created ארץ ישראל for us.

But that leads to a new question: If ארץ ישראל was meant to be uniquely ours, fundamentally and intrinsically ours, why didn't He give it to us right away? What did he allow other nations to settle there first?

And that question requires us to study ספר בראשית and שמות, to learn about how אברהם discovered the רבשי"ע in a world that had forgotten Him, how הקב"ה entered into a unique ברית with him, how that ברית required that we undergo the crucible of מצרים, how מכירת יוסף led to the actualization of that ברית, and so on. And as we read these stories we are led to understand that ארץ ישראל was meant to be ours, by that the fulfillment of that promise and destiny was a long drawn out promise, and so ארץ ישראל was held by others, in trust for us.

ברצונו נתן להם וברצונו נתן לנו - it was the same רצון, to give it to us, but first to them, in trust for us.

We are going to be reading these פרשיות, from בראשית until החדש, for some time to come. And as we read them we should bear in mind the lesson that Rashi is teaching us. That the fundamental lesson of these פרשיות is to teach us the story of our connection to ארץ ישראל, deep and profound and inseparable.

In these days when ארץ ישראל is so imperilled, let us use the opportunity of these פרשיות to strengthen that bond, to deepen it, to better appreciate it, until we shall find ourselves in ארץ ישראל, in happiness and joy, when ציון ברינה.