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In the ongoing discussion in our pages of the historic rights of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, we offer a provocative essay by Dr. Uriel Simon, Professor of Bible at Bar Ilan University, which is followed by a rejoinder by Dr. Leon Stitskin, Associate Editor of *TRADITION*.

THE BIBLICAL DESTINIES — CONDITIONAL PROMISES

"Thou art faithful, O Lord our God, and your words are faithful, and not one of your words will you retract. Because thou art a faithful and merciful king. Blessed art thou O Lord, faithful to all His words."

In this blessing — which we utter after reciting the prophetic portion in the synagogue — we express our faith that the biblical promises about final redemption, about those days in which the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God as water fills the sea, will be indeed realized totally.

The problem concerning us these days is whether the return to Zion and the establishment of the State of Israel are the beginning of the final redemption, of the last days, or whether it is more correct to see our return to the Land in the perspective of our two previous settlements: that of those who left Egypt and that of those who returned from Babylonia. Rabbi S. Goren possesses a clear answer, as was demonstrated in his address at the Rav Kuk Yeshivah: "Everything proceeds according to a heavenly plan and we need not fear any man. We must be certain that we are destined to realize the third redemption and that in our day Yehudah will be saved and Israel will dwell in safety" (*Hatsofeh*, Shevat, 4 1974).

When Rabbi Goren uses the term "third redemption" he refers to the midrash which sees in the third redemption the final redemption: "and the third shall be left alive" (Zech. 13:8) — that they will not settle finally in the land except in the third re-

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demption; the first redemption — that is the redemption from Egypt; the second redemption — the redemption of Ezra; the third — *that which has no end*" (*Tanhuma, Shofetim, 9*).

Everyone agrees that our deeds have an influence upon hastening the messianic process or delaying it. However, there are differences of opinion about whether the process is one-directional, irreversible, and final. One cannot decide about this matter, which arouses and heats hearts, on the basis of this midrash or another. It is incumbent upon us to understand the implications involved and whether they are legitimated from biblical sources. For this purpose we will examine the biblical destinies to determine whether they are absolute or conditional promises. A conditional promise means that its fulfillment depends upon the fulfillment on our part of the conditions it implies.

The key to our relation to the Land of Israel is found in the history of Abraham. On the basis of the principle, "the deeds of the fathers are a sign to the sons," let us examine several quite strange facts cardinal in the life of Abraham. The fundamental fact is, no doubt, that the father of the Jewish people, was not born in the promised land. Abraham was born in a far-away land, and his attachment to the Land was based upon a commandment interwoven with a promise: "Go forth from your country, and from your kindred, and from the house of your father unto the land which I shall show you" (Genesis 12:1). But Abraham's heroic adherence to this imperative was only the beginning of a long path. At the Covenant between the Pieces (Genesis 15) he was informed that his sons would inherit the land only after 400 years. To this startling delay in receiving the land was added a worrisome delay in the fulfillment of the promise "and I will make you a great people." Isaac was born only after long years of barrenness, almost after despair. Thus we learn that even the act of becoming a great people was not a natural development but rather the pronounced result of the fulfillment of a promise. Moreover, Abraham's dwelling in the land promised to him was under the status of "a stranger and resident." His wells were stopped up by the Philistines and only when he had to bury his dead wife did he acquire an actual foothold in the land in the form of a small gravesite.

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In order to understand the meaning of these facts we must distinguish between natural attachment to any land and Israel's destined attachment to the Land of Israel. Natural attachment means that a people dwells in its land by right. Thus the nations of the world understand their possession of their lands as a natural right, which is a product of weighty historical facts (primal possession, conquest, extended possession, development of culture, etc.). A natural attachment is grasped in the national consciousness as a basic given right: a nation may occasionally be forced to defend its freedom or sovereignty but not its very existence on its land. The danger of exile is not an actual threat and is thus far from consciousness.

A destined attachment means that the right to the land rests upon a Divine promise which preceded (in time and in principle) actual possession. Therefore, this right is not dependent upon actual possession.

Each type of attachment has its own advantages and disadvantages. The natural attachment of peoples to their lands is continuous but finite, that is, it may eventually end; whereas, the destined attachment of Israel to its Land is sporadic but nevertheless eternal. The words of the prophet Amos affirm this distinction between our temporary rule over the land and our eternal survival as a nation. "Behold the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; however, I will surely not destroy the House of Jacob" (Amos 9:8). The kingdom of Israel will be destroyed by God because of its sin, but it is promised that the House of Jacob will never be destroyed. It will survive in exile and will finally return to its land. Thus, the destined attachment is not dependent upon changing historical conditions. This basic idea is expressed in the Torah through the anticipation of the promises to the fathers to the actual possession of the land. Our settling in the land is a direct response to the commandment "Go forth." Moreover, the "Law of Return" is an appropriate expression of this abnormal attachment of our people to its land. The law promises every Jew, by virtue of his being a Jew, the possibility to fulfill the commandment of "Go forth." The very act of a Jew's *aliyah* brings automatic citizenship, without the procedures re-

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quired in all other countries.

Let us return to the fathers. Their fragile hold of the land stood in contradiction to their promised right over it. It is a very instructive fact that during the conflict with Lot, Abraham did not refrain from a "territorial compromise" ("If thou wilt take the left hand, then I the right, and if thou take the right hand, then I will go to the left" (Genesis 13:9), in order to bring peace. He surely would not have done this if it implied a limitation of the destined possession of the land. On the contrary, the very pursuit of peace was made possible by the distinction between destined possession and temporary rule.

The conclusion which must be drawn from all this is that the delay of the realization of the promise has two aspects: one essential and one educational. The essential aspect is the clarification of the metahistorical and metanatural nature of the Jewish people and its attachment to the Land. The educational aspect is the responsibility of those who have to carry that destiny in the difficult test of non-actualization in the present. The stories of the fathers bring out in utmost frankness the dimensions of the difficulty bound up in these trials: "And Sarah laughed within herself" (Gen. 18:12); And Abraham said with resignation to God: "Oh that Ishmael might live by your favor!" (Gen. 17:18). Strong faith is a pre-condition to the fulfillment of the destiny: ". . . walk before me, and be thou whole-hearted. And I will make my covenant between me and thee . . ." (Gen. 17:1-2), "And he put his trust in the Lord, and He reckoned it to his merit" (Gen. 15:6).

The purpose of the destiny is defined by God's words regarding the election of Abraham: "For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his posterity, to keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice; to the end that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what he has promised him" (Gen. 18:14). This statement teaches us two things: 1) the election is not an end in itself but rather bears clear ethical-religious significance; 2) the realization of the promises is conditional upon Israel's observance of God's ways.

The centrality of justice and righteousness in the framework of the "destined attachment" must be repeatedly emphasized.

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For a chosen people the danger is pride, one of whose expressions is the appropriation of an inner closed national ethical standard. The Torah stresses the meta-national nature of God's commandments in the very delay of the reception of the Land and the need to wait in Egypt: "And in the fourth generation they shall come back hither, for the iniquity of the Amorites will not be fulfilled until then" (Gen. 15:16). That is, despite our destined right, we do not yet have physical right, because the possession of the Seven Nations is still in force. Thus, our destined right does not automatically abolish the natural rights of others, just as the natural rights of the Canaanites does not eliminate our destined right. Thus, the "territorial compromise" of Abraham with Lot was made in light of the trust that "All the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed forever" (Gen. 13:15). And let us note that these words were said to Abraham after he conceded magnanimously part of the land to his nephew. His noble decision in the clash between the destined right and immediate ethical responsibility was considered as an act of righteousness. Similarly, the courageous intercession of Abraham for the men of Sodom, was clean of any self-interest regarding his own right to their land. Abraham knew that the God of Israel is the Lord of all nations and the judge of righteousness over the entire earth (Gen. 18:25). Thus, one must say that the realization of the promise "to give them the inheritance of the nations" (Ps. 111:6) is not a matter of the arbitrary will of the God of Israel but is dependent upon the righteousness of Israel, on the one hand, and the evil-mindedness of the nations, on the other.

The Torah warns us against considering the wonders of God as a sign of our ethical superiority: "Do not say in your heart, after that the Lord your God has thrust them out from before you: 'It is because of my righteousness that the Lord had brought me in to possess this land.' Whereas it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is driving them out from before you . . . and in order to fulfill the oath that the Lord made to your fathers . . . Know, then . . . for you are stiff-necked people . . ." (Deut. 9:4-7).

The realization of Divine promises in itself is not a sign of the

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righteousness of the generation. Israel as the conqueror of Canaan is the instrument of God's wrath, carrying out the judgment of God with the Canaanites. If Israel follows in the ways of the Canaanites, a similar fate awaits it. "But you must keep My statutes and My ordinances, and you must not do any of those abhorrent things . . . ; lest the land vomit you out for defiling it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you" (Lev. 18:26-28). Thus, it must be said that before the coming of the messiah there is no identification between the actual possession and the eternal unconditional destiny, lest the destiny become a stumbling block, under whose wings acts like those of the Canaanites would be permitted. Therefore, the promise of the land as "an eternal possession" (Gen. 17:8) does not mean continuous actual possession, but rather and necessarily, an eternal destined possession.

The serious danger of turning the conditional promise to an absolute promise is exemplified and concretized in the "Temple Sermon" of Jeremiah (chap. 7). Israel in that period could not imagine that God would allow His temple to be destroyed in the hands of the idolaters. The people transformed the sanctity of the temple to a protective covering for their sins. Rather than to advance and raise Judaea morally and spiritually the temple became a stumbling block. Thus the prophet stated: "Do not put your trust in that lie: 'This is the Lord's temple, the Lord's temple, the Lord's temple . . . !'" (7:4). "A robbers' hide-out — is that what this house, which bears My name, has become in your eyes?!" (7:11). "And I will do to the house which now bears My name, and in which you place your trust, the place which I provided for you and your fathers before you, just as I did to Shiloh" (7:14).

We must conclude, that just as the actual possession of the land generates feelings of national confidence and stability, thus it may close the hearts and lead to sin. Consequently, the destined possession demands commitment and awakens the heart to hear the word of God. In other words, the pendulum movement between exile and redemption, which has been our lot throughout our long history, has not necessarily reached its end. It could, God forbid, recur.

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I believe that we are living in a period of the fulfillment of God's promise, of God's help to his people, and of the realization of the pentateuchal and prophetic destinies. This belief ought to ingrain in us confidence, readiness for sacrifice, and most of all, to help us in gathering our strength and force for the fuller realization of these destinies. At the same time we must beware of the danger of "false messianism," of an historical shortcut, which could arise out of our failure to distinguish between a period when "the world behaves normally" and between the days of the messiah, "in which the wolf lies down with the lamb." This shortcut is created when we trust that our present settlement in the Land is necessarily final. This very trust could contribute to our loss of the great opportunity given us. On the contrary: our possession of the land will grow stronger to the extent that we recall that it is conditional upon the nature of our acts. And these our acts must include the pursuit of justice and peace. Just as we must see in coming to the land, in settling and building it, practical commandments of our time, thus we must not permit the attainment of peace to escape from the boundaries of our responsibility and assign it to the grace of the messiah.

Our destined right over the Land will actualize to the degree that we relate to the natural right of our Arab neighbors in this Land. — "Zion will be redeemed by justice" (Isaiah 1:27). The holiness of the Land has meaning only in so far as it acts as a basis for the holiness of the community.