

Beshalach 5779

The Secret to Separating Wood & Steel Shavings

Our parasha begins:

וַיִּשְׁלַח אֱלֹהִים מִצֵּיפֹת מִדֶּבֶר סִינַי וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם
וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם :וַיִּשְׁלַח אֱלֹהִים מִצֵּיפֹת מִדֶּבֶר סִינַי
וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם :וַיִּשְׁלַח אֱלֹהִים

When Pharaoh sent the nation out, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might renege and return to Egypt." So, God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea.

The Israelites went up out of Egypt "chamushim". Rashi cites two interpretations for the word "chamushim". One, based on the root CHAMESH meaning five, because only one in five Jews agreed to leave Egypt; and the other from the root CHIMUSH, meaning armed with weapons.

Are these really two different interpretations? We shall see later.

Four millennia ago, the infinite Creator chose our ancestors and us to be His Jewish nation. Of all the gentiles at the time of Avraham, and of all those who were yet to be born, only the Jewish people are "wedded" to the Creator, as so sublimely depicted by King Shlomo in his Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs).

There are Jews who distance themselves from Judaism by overlooking our unique history and our God-appointed mission. And there are also loyal Jews who are constantly overlooking our relationship with HaShem in an effort to attain a degree of understanding of the infinite being we call HaShem.

A major, if not the ultimate, conclusion produced by an overview of Jewish history is the ongoing process of winnowing out large portions of people – similar to a healthy body that rejects foreign organs and detrimental intruders. Yishmael (Ishmael) was excluded from being a Jew, as was Esau (Esav). Of the many millions of Jewish men who were slaves in Egypt, only Yehoshua bin Nun (Joshua) and Calev ben Yefuneh (Caleb) entered the Land at the end of the 40-year sojourn in the desert. Hundreds of thousands, and perhaps millions, of Jews of the northern tribes were exiled to points east by King Shalmaneser of Assyria and were lost to the Jewish nation. Who can estimate the number of Jews who were cut off from our people by conscious assimilation? And the process is continuing in full strength to this day.

What is behind the process? What are the criteria according to which one Jew remains connected to the nation while another is lost? These questions will remain unanswered until HaShem chooses to reveal His secrets.

The process cannot be denied or tempered, as it continues “full steam” to this very day as demonstrated by the following example:

A very large heap of wood shavings is mixed together with small bits of steel shavings, and we are required to separate out the wood shavings in order to be left only with the metal filings.

There are three possible methods to achieve it: A powerful wind would remove the lighter wood, fire can burn the pile leaving only the steel bits, or the steel can be drawn out by

a magnet.

The strong winds of assimilation have removed countless numbers of our people, far more numerous than those who were murdered for being Jews. This process is being accelerated in our time through the conservative and reform movements which are busily undermining the basic framework of our nation.

The second process – fire has decimated countless numbers of Jews through Christian and Islamic acts up to the Second World War. Despite the fact that many pure righteous tzaddikim were also murdered, the Gemara in Bava Kama states that when a decree is implemented in a specific place, all those who are there – righteous and not – are victims.

The magnet is the attraction that brings an authentic Jewish soul to return to and plant his roots in Eretz Yisrael.

To return to the question: Rashi's two interpretations for the word "chamushim," the Torah uses to describe the Jewish people's exodus from Egypt: "one fifth" vs "armed with weapons" are seemingly contradictory, conflicting and autonomous. However, they are both correct in their depiction of the exodus. Indeed, only twenty percent of the Jews left Egypt. But who were those 20% who chose to leave a bright and promising future of the nascent Jewish nation in the golden land of the Nile?

They were the small minority who were prepared to take up arms and fight for the liberation of the Land promised by HaShem to the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov (Abraham, Issac and Jacob). The other 80% had other plans for their lives of freedom which ran contrary to the wishes of HaShem; and hastened their death in the plague of darkness.

As things stand, and in human terms, Medinat Yisrael exists on the thin olive-colored line of Tzahal who physically defend the Land, and those who actively and sincerely support them by their Torah and mitzvot.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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