

Be'shalach 5781

BS"D Parashat Be'shalach 5781

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

The Significance of Ya'akov Grasping Esav's Heel

Bereishiet 25,24-26

וַיָּבֹא יִצְחָק וְרִבְקָה בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל :וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק וְרִבְקָה בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק וְרִבְקָה בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל :וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק וְרִבְקָה בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל :וַיֵּצֵא יִצְחָק וְרִבְקָה בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

The time came for her (Rivka) to give birth, and there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so, they named him Esau. After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel...

The significance of Ya'akov grasping Esau's heel at the first moment of entering this world must not be overlooked.

It could be interpreted as an act of defiance at Esau's audacious, impudent, and presumptuous appearance as the bechor (first born with all its rights and privileges), or a statement of brotherly love that Ya'akov has difficulty parting from his twin brother.

In Parashat Toldot (Bereishiet 27,41-45) Rivka, with Yitzchak's consent, instructs Ya'akov to flee Esav's flaming anger.

When Esav's intentions became known to Rivka, as Esav said, "The days of mourning for my father will be here soon. I will then kill my brother Ya'akov", she summoned Ya'akov and told

him to flee to her brother Lavan in Charan and “remain with him until Esav’s anger has subsided, and then I will send word and summon you home.”

In Parashat Vayishlach Rashi says that Rivka sent her elderly nursemaid Devorah to inform Ya’akov to return home.

This requires an explanation. Esav’s anger had not subsided one iota, so why did Rivka send for Ya’akov to return?

I suggest that Rivka saw that twenty years of separation had contributed nothing to mollifying Esav’s anger and desire for revenge. She understood that peace would never reign between the brothers, nor between their descendants until the end of time.

With this new perception of the unbridgeable gap that existed between the brothers, Rivka informs Ya’akov that he must return and confront Esav with faith in HaShem, and act like a courageous man (as King David charges his young son Shlomo in Melachim 1 chapter 2,2: “I am about to go the way of all the world, so be strong, act like a man”).

Ya’akov, too, understood that the time for flight had passed, and that he must provide future generations with an example of trust in HaShem to be able to confront any enemy whom they might encounter.

It became painfully clear to Ya’akov that the idea that he could grasp the heel of his brother for support and encouragement was never valid. Esav was never brotherly; even from the outset of their birth he was an adversary, antagonist, opponent, and nemesis.

Israel’s Big Brother

The leaders of the Zionist Movement including the heads of the Yishuv prior to the establishment of the State, and until this present day, espoused the doctrine that the Medina cannot

exist or develop without the ongoing support of a super-power "big brother". In the early years of the Medina the Soviet Union wanted to fill the role of big brother based on the large numbers of former Soviet citizens at the helm and the socialist orientation of the Labor Party governments. But at the end of the day, they decided that their interests lie with the oil rich Arab sheikhs rather than the nascent and imperiled Jewish state. Europe could not be our big brother while their hands were still red with the real blood of our brothers and sisters.

The United States: despite their bad **track** record during the war when they refused to bomb the **tracks** leading to the concentration camps, and the arms embargo they placed on Israel during the 1948 War of Independence, we got down on our knees to grab the heel of Esav pleading for the US to be our big brother.

However, today judging by the list of questionable characters who were appointed to sensitive positions in the Biden administration, it is quite evident that, just as Esav's agenda did not include the welfare of his brother Ya'akov, the US agenda does not include the security of the Jewish state. The US under the Democratic Party is no longer willing or even able to continue their big brother role of recent years.

However, there is a good side to this episode. Just as Rivka taught her son Ya'akov that when all seems bleak, that is the time to stand up and fend for oneself. To be a man. To be an independent nation. To be HaShem's chosen people. But the lesson is slow in forthcoming. So, this places Israel in the awkward position of having to find another "big brother".

China? No! China is a huge torso with no neshama.

The EU? No thanks! With friends like these enemies are redundant!

Russia? They are too busy with their own problems to look

across their border.

It reminds one of the pathetic story of a couple who entered a travel agency and asked the clerk to recommend a nice place to spend the summer. He said that Spain and Portugal are lovely places. The couple refused because of the bad history of the Inquisition. He then recommended England. They pushed that aside quickly mentioning that the English had expelled the Jews twice in their history, plus closed the gates of Eretz Yisrael during the Shoah. The clerk was losing patience and gave them a globe to search and excusing himself said that he would return shortly. When he returned and asked if they found a suitable place, the man replied, "perhaps you have another globe?"!

So, what does HaShem do for His people in the holy Medina? If they cannot find a “BIG BROTHER”, then HaShem turns us into a “big brother” for others.

One need not be a great political scientist to know that many Arab countries vie for our friendship, not because they endorse the Zionist dream but because they need our great technological weapons; our unique Jewish saychel (wisdom) in many varied fields, and for the connections we have throughout the world.

The dynamic of this historical change is just beginning. The words of the prophet Yeshayahu (chapter 49) ring now loud and clear.

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13) Shout for joy, you heavens; rejoice, you earth; burst into song, you mountains! For the Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.

14) But Zion said, "The Lord has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me"

15) (*and Hashem replies*) Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!

16) Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.

17) Your children hasten back, and those who laid you waste depart from you.

18) Lift up your eyes and look around; all your children gather and come to you. As surely as I live, declares the Lord, you will wear them all as ornaments; you will put them on, like a bride.

19) Though you were ruined and made desolate and your land laid waste, now you will be too small for your people, and those who devoured you will be far away.

20) The children born during your bereavement will yet say in your hearing, "This place is too small for us; give us more space to live in."

21) Then you will say in your heart, "who bore me these? I was bereaved and barren; I was exiled and rejected. Who brought these up? I was left all alone, but these where have they come from?"

22) This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Behold, I will beckon to the nations, I will lift up my banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their shoulders.

23) Kings will be your foster-fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. They will bow down before you with their faces to the ground; they will lick the dust at your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord; those who hope in me will not be disappointed.

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Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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