

BS"D Parashat Shemot 5786

Halachic Implications

Last week's parasha, Vayechi, the final portion in the Book of Bereisheit records Ya'akov's fatherly request, or rather his demand, to be buried in Eretz Yisrael and not in Egypt, even temporarily.

The Torah does not record the internal deliberations that took place in Ya'akov's mind regarding his burial place; the impression given is that he was entirely certain of his choice. I submit that because we know that Ya'akov was a deeply spiritual and emotional man as seen in his "love at first sight" encounter with Rachel and his prolonged inability to be comforted following the disappearance of Yosef.

Ya'akov was aware that with his passing, the centuries-long period of Galut (exile), including years of cruel servitude at the hands of the Egyptians, would commence, as revealed to Avraham Avinu during the Brit Bein HaBetarim (the Covenant Between the Parts).

With this knowledge, Ya'akov surely understood the significance of his departure just when his descendants would need him most and even his burial site could offer them a glimmer of hope during their enslavement. There were many other significant reasons to consider remaining with them in Egypt at that time.

I am certain that all these alternatives crossed his mind, but after weighing them all his final conclusion confirmed the values he received from his grandparents, Avraham and Sarah, and his parents, Yitzchak and Rivka. When placed on the "Halachic scale," where economic, emotional, and practical values are on one side, and the opportunity to live and even

to be buried in Eretz Yisrael is on the other, the sanctity of being close to HaShem in His chosen land outweighs all other considerations.

A Moral-Halachic Dilemma

A Rav or Dayan (judge), when making a Halachic judgment, may not rule based solely on the texts of the Tanach, the Mishnah, or even the Gemara. His legal framework is the Shulchan Aruch and the precedents established in Responsa literature throughout the generations.

Nevertheless, the moral lessons we glean from the Torah serve as vital landmarks in our Jewish value system.

Many years ago, I experienced a moral-Halachic dilemma with no one to consult with. It was thirty or forty years ago during a visit to New York. I was scheduled to board my flight home on Sunday at 9:00 PM. Several hours before departure, I received a phone call from the Lubavitcher Rebbe's secretary (Rabbi Groner) that the Rebbe requests to speak with me privately at 4:00 PM.

I do not know how the Rebbe knew I was in New York. Although I consider myself a Chassid of all holy Rabbis and do not have a particular affiliation with Chabad (perhaps because the Kahana family from Tzfat were Tzanzer Chassidim), I felt the weight of the invitation. To meet the Rebbe and still catch my flight, my schedule had to be dictated by minutes, not hours.

About thirty minutes before the scheduled meeting, I was driving on Canal Street in Manhattan toward the Manhattan Bridge to reach Eastern Parkway. In the years before my Aliyah, I knew New York without a map; however, the city had changed. I recalled that the off-ramp from the bridge led to a left turn toward Eastern Parkway. To my dismay, I encountered three lanes and didn't know which to choose.

I chose the wrong one and found myself in a neighborhood where I was the only white person. Every street corner had a long traffic light and time ticked away; It became clear that I could not meet with the Rebbe and still make my flight. I had to decide which priority took precedence.

I made my choice, though I believe some might disagree.

At that moment, I recalled Ya'akov's decision to be buried in Eretz Yisrael despite the justifications to remain in Egypt. Later, as I ascended the stairs to the plane that would return me to the Holy Land, it became clear that I had made the right decision, following in the footsteps of our father Ya'akov that one should never turn down the opportunity to return to the Promised Land, because a missed chance to return to Eretz Yisrael may not come again.

To this day, I do not know what the Rebbe wished to discuss. He passed away in 1994 at the age of 92; I had hoped to meet the holy Rebbe here in Eretz Yisrael, but it was not meant to be.

Miracles Today

In Tractate Yoma 29a, the Gemara states that the Book of Esther, with its miracles, is the final volume of the twenty-four books of Tanach, so there was no possibility to include the miracles that occurred in the time of Chanuka. The implication is that many more miracles will occur in the future but will not be recorded in Tanach.

Are we today on the verge of another major "Purim miracle" occurring in Persia?

Not long ago, they were firing missiles at the heart of the Medina, but now the Ayatollah is crouching like a trapped rat in a cellar in Tehran, waiting to escape to Russia. Were it Halachically permissible, we would have to recite Hallel every

day here in HaShem's Holy Land.

How blessed we are to be here at this time. We call out to our brothers and sisters in the Galut: come home and be part of the exponential miracles occurring in this generation.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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