

BS"D Parashat Va'yaishev and Chanuka 5783

Suicidal Galut

The moment HaShem established Medinat Yisrael, the curtain of existence began coming down on all the Jewish communities in the galut. They became increasingly irrelevant to the ongoing and future history of the Jewish people. It is only a question of time, and not too long, when they will disappear.

Let me explain on the background of the last two Torah parshiot of Toldot and Va'yai'tzai.

The Gemara (Yuma 83b) relates that the illustrious Tana, Rabbi Meir, was able to discern the basic character of a person from their name. And it is cited in various rabbinic works that when parents decide on a name for their newborn child it is considered a nevu'a ketana; a minor prophecy.

The world's most illustrious twins were named by their parents, Ya'akov and Aisav.

Aisav means wild growing grass, weeds, or herbs. Aisav is described as "a man of the field" – eesh ha'sadeh. Ya'akov, taken from the Hebrew aikev (heel) implies consistency as when walking, one foot follows the other with cadence and precision, and Ya'akov is described as "the dweller of the tents" – yoshev o'hali".

These descriptions are embedded in the names and characters of the two brothers.

A field is an open area, permitting unhindered free access to

wherever one wishes to go. Devoid of obligation or responsibility to any particular point in the field; so, when it becomes uncomfortable one can just move on. A field contains any assortment of weeds, grass and herbs intertwined or growing alone depending on where the wind has scattered the seeds.

Open fields have no order. No law except the law of the jungle. Just pick and choose whatever appeals to you at that given moment and discard what is disturbing or irritating. This was Aisav: the man of the field. He discarded the responsibilities that come with being a firstborn, selling it for a pittance. He returns from the field so tired that he implores his brother Ya'akov to feed him lentils. The details are a drag on him; just give him the pleasures without the effort.

Aisav sees no importance in living a disciplined life, because as he says to Ya'akov (Beraiyshiet 25:32):

:אֵיזָבֵל אָמַר אֶל יַעֲקֹב אֲנִי עֵשָׂה בְּרִאשׁוֹן וְעַתָּה אֵשֶׁתְּךָ מִלְּבָנִים וְעַתָּה אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה לְבָנִים וְעַתָּה אֲנִי מִלְּבָנִים וְעַתָּה אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה לְבָנִים

“I will soon die, so why do I need the birthright?”

Aisav's value system serves as the ideological basis of today's reform movement and its inevitable result – assimilation. Discard what is inconvenient; Shabbat, kashrut, family purity, marrying within the Jewish nation, and certainly the embarrassment of the Jewish State – Eretz Yisrael – where Hebrew is spoken, and the chosen people take the Bible seriously. With so much Judaism in the way, it becomes uncomfortable to be “one” with gentile neighbors and more difficult to become assimilated into their ways. So, Judaism must be discarded. If lentils were good enough for Aisav, son of Yitzchak and Rivka, then bacon and lobster are good enough for those who wish to escape the “unfortunate”

fact of – being born a Jew.

Wild weeds grow in their reform temples in the form of same-sex marriages, and the “spiritual leader” who performs Joey and Jane’s wedding together with the local minister. The reform leader who services the whims of his congregants and counts them as Jews when only the father is Jewish. Wherever the money and conveniences are, there you will find the many Aisavs of Reform Judaism.

Ya’akov is different. He lived a structured life where consistency was the rule of the day. He is the “tent dweller”, which demands conduct suitable for living a demarcated lifestyle. Structured davening (prayers) three times a day; laws pertaining to what and when one eats. Moral and ethical conduct between people in accordance with the value system revealed by HaShem. The acceptance of responsibility without escaping through rationalizations based on weakness and fear.

Aisav cannot be Ya’akov any more than Ya’akov can be Aisav. Their dispositions, characters and ambitions are reflections of their souls. Rivka felt this when each child was aroused in her womb; Ya’akov upon passing a place of Torah study and Aisav when passing a place of avoda zara (idolatry).

The dichotomy of Ya’akov and Aisav is clearcut. Ya’akov clings to HaShem through Torah and mitzvot (commandments) from which he derives his lifeblood of existence, whereas Aisav sees his survival through the ability to stalk his prey in the field with his bow and arrows. He has no need for HaShem, for he is the master of his own life and future.

Now with the distinction between the God-fearing, responsibility-taking Ya’akov and the anarchistic, hedonistic Aisav so clear, it would be correct to conclude that the two cannot thrive together.

One is either with the mainstream of God-driven history, where the galut has finished serving its historical purpose of

“hosting” the exiled Jewish nation, or with the peripheral segments of Judaism heading towards oblivion.

At this time in our history, HaShem has placed before His children in Israel the huge historic challenge of restoring our national independence within the borders of Eretz Yisrael, in preparation for the next stage of world history. This stage will witness the execution of Godly justice upon those nations who dealt so cruelly with Am Yisrael, while the Jewish people will be under HaShem’s protective wing in Eretz Yisrael.

But confusion reigns. Not much different from the time of Chanuka. Then, as now, Am Yisrael was faced with an existential threat. A large percentage of our people were drawn to Hellenism and discarded the Torah. Each Jew was faced with the personal challenge to the depths of his soul: join with the Maccabim at the risk of your life or be a bystander in the life-and-death struggle for the soul of Am Yisrael.

Through the sacrifices of the strong and courageous, HaShem awarded us independence from foreign rule for the following 200 years. And it is the mesirut nefesh (self-sacrifice) of those holy people that we celebrate the holiday of Chanuka.

At this juncture in our history, each Jew is again faced with the choice of being Ya’akov or Aisav: to pick up the gauntlet of the strong and courageous or to back off from the responsibility of a firstborn.

Either choose to join in the struggle to rebuild our nation in Eretz YIsrael or to cringe in the corner behind the apron strings of your fears.

It is not easy to be a “Ya’akov” in a world surrounded by Aisavs, but it is the Ya’akovs who will survive and guarantee the eternal existence of Am Yisrael.

Be a winner; be on the winning side of history!

Shabbat Shalom and have a meaningful holiday of Chanuka!

Nachman Kahana

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