

# BS"D Parashat Vayaitzai 5785

## A Many Splendored Thing

The ways of HaShem are beyond our understanding. However, HaShem appeared to the prophets through human characteristics to enable us to relate in some small way to the Infinite and unimaginable. The prophets perceived the Infinite at times acting towards us with compassion, courage, anger, pride, or disappointment, but always with love.

In the evening prayer (Arvit) we say:

ברוך אתה יהוה 'ה אלהינו

*Blessed are You HaShem who loves His nation Yisrael.*

In the morning (Shacharit) we say:

ברוך אתה יהוה אלהינו 'ה אלהינו

*Blessed are You HaShem who has chosen His nation Yisrael in love.*

In our Parashat Vayaitzai, Ya'akov arrived at the municipal well of Charan just when several shepherds were lingering around. When Ya'akov questioned them about their seeming indolence in the middle of the workday, they replied (Bereisheit 29:8-11):

אנחנו נשבעים לך כי לא נעשה כדבר הזה  
כי אנחנו נשבעים לך כי לא נעשה כדבר הזה

*"We cannot (water the sheep) until all the flocks are gathered and (then all the shepherds will) roll the stone from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep."*

And the Torah relates that while he was talking with them, Rachel came with her father Lavan's sheep. When Ya'akov saw her, he approached the well and plucked the stone up as easily as one does to a bottle cork (Rashi).

How could Ya'akov, the yeshiva bocher, single handedly dislodge a stone that required the combined strength of many grown men?

I submit:

Among the many masterpieces that King Solomon authored is the classic Shir Ha'Shirim (Song of Songs). The illustrious Rabbi Akiva comments on this magnum opus of King Solomon in the Mishna (Ya'adim 3:5):

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*All scriptures are holy, but Shir Ha'Shirim is the holy of holies.*

Rabbi Akiva's soul was moved by Shlomo Ha'Melech's description of the love HaShem showed for the Jewish people (8:6-7):

[illegible]

*Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like a blazing fire, like a mighty*

*flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away.*

It is not surprising that R. Akiva was the one who was so touched by Shlomo HaMelech's description of love; because R. Akiva knew that true love was indeed "a many splended thing".

The Gemara (Ketubot 63a) relates that the young and beautiful Rachel, gave up her family, wealth and youth for love of Akiva, the shepherd. She believed that he could be a Torah giant in the generation of Torah giants, and struggled alone for 24 years so that her Akiva could learn Torah in Yerushalayim without interruption.

At the end of that period, Akiva the shepherd, who was now the world-renowned Rabbi Akiva, returned home to be reunited with his beloved wife. The Gemara relates that he arrived with 24,000 disciples. All the town's people came out to honor the great Rabbi. Rachel approached her husband and bent down to kiss his feet. When the ushers pushed her back, R. Akiva brought the crowd to silence. And standing before the throng of thousands of his students and onlookers, he raised up his beloved Rachel and declared: "My Torah and your Torah is all HER Torah".

What Shlomo Ha'Melech was saying, which was so well understood by R. Akiva, was that the love HaShem feels toward Am Yisrael moves the Creator to perform mighty acts not within the framework of the natural world which He created. Just as the love of a man for a woman can move him (or her) to perform remarkable deeds. HaShem, in his love for Am Yisrael, changed the natural order which He Himself had created: The ten plagues, splitting of the Red Sea, the Manna and quail to support millions of people for forty years in the barren desert, the destruction of the Canaanite kingdoms and the innumerable miracles up to this very day.

When Ya'akov saw Rachel, the sudden surge of overpowering love that Ya'akov felt empowered him with the strength to roll the rock, as easily as one would pull a cork from a bottle top (Rashi).

## True Love

What are the telltale signs of true love? The desire to be close to the person one loves; the need to communicate, to be understood and to understand each other; the desire to give more and more without expecting anything in return; and to see only the good and forgive that which is less than good.

After listening to many religious Jews living in the galut, I have concluded that although many learn Torah and keep mitzvot most do not love Being Jewish. Many have an acquaintance with Judaism, some even like Judaism, but most do not love being Jewish. If they were, then in no way could they remain in the galut.

To love being Jewish is to strive to be as close to HaShem as humanly possible. And to be close to HaShem means to live in the land of which the Torah states (Devarim 11:12):

ארצנו ארצנו אשר ארצנו-ה' ארצנו ארצנו אשר ארצנו-ה' ארצנו ארצנו  
אשר ארצנו ארצנו

*A land the LORD your God longs for; the eyes (view) of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.*

To love being Jewish means returning to the Holy Land without calculating its personal or professional expedience, just as a young couple very much in love throws expediency to the wind

in order to fulfill their ambitions.

To love being Jewish means to know and to communicate with the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov in the holy language of HaShem. I would not be wrong in stating that the overwhelming majority of religious leaders in the galut cannot hold a Hebrew conversation on the level of a 10-year-old Israeli child.

To love being Jewish is to remain home and prepare for the beautiful meaningful holiday of Pesach, and not to take flight to a hotel or resort in order to escape the ghosts of chametz.

To love being Jewish is to look forward, every week, to Shabbat and regard the kitchen preparations as a personal simcha for the great merit of being part of God's chosen nation.

To love being Jewish is to be part of a daily minyan that imparts to the congregation a spiritual experience; not to seek out the fastest minyan in town in order to begin work early.

To love being Jewish is to behave in reverence and to be silent when present in a bet kneset; not to sit and talk, stopping only to partake in the "club".

To love being Jewish is to be part of the defense of Eretz Yisrael as a soldier of Tzahal.

To love being Jewish is to notice the faults and shortcomings of the Israeli leadership and to join here in our efforts to redress the mistakes.

To love being Jewish is to learn Torah in the special environment of the land where the Torah was intended by HaShem to be kept.

If your spiritual mentor in the galut does not encourage aliya to Eretz Yisrael, it has nothing to do with the land or its

people; it simply means that he is involved, even deeply involved, with Yehadut, but not in love with all that it demands.

Love is indeed a “many splendored thing”. It is a call from the depths of one’s soul to announce that it has been touched and resonates to the mind and emotions. If one does not feel love for Judaism in its entirety, then that person’s soul has not been touched.

Ya’akov’s soul was touched when he met Rachel, as was Shlomo Ha’Melech when he felt the love of HaShem for Am Yisrael, and the soul of Rabbi Akiva towards the woman who made him the scholar that he became.

Those of us who have returned to the Land of Israel in love are, together with our Israeli born brothers and sisters, continuing to forge ahead in the authentic Jewish history that was so violently and cruelly disrupted 2000 years ago.

No obstacle will impede the Jews who love HaShem, the land, and Am Yisrael from our determination to restore the former glory of Am Yisrael as HaShem’s chosen people: neither gentile enemies from without nor Jewish traitors from within.

As Shlomo Ha’Melech wrote: It (love) burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away.

Love for Yehadut is indeed a many splendid thing!

A most relevant manifestation of HaShem’s love for Am Yisrael is what we are experiencing in Eretz Yisrael, as expressed in Tehillim 124:

תהלים תשס"ה

*A song of ascents of David.*

*If HaShem had not been with us, let Israel say;*

*If HaShem had not been with us when we were attacked,  
Then they would have devoured us alive when their anger  
flared against us;  
Then the flood (hate) would have engulfed us, the torrent  
would have swept over us,  
the raging waters would have swept us away.  
Praise be HaShem who has not let us be torn by their teeth.  
We have escaped like a bird from the fowler's snare; the  
snare has been broken and we have escaped.  
Our help is in the name of HaShem – Creator of heaven and  
earth*

SHABBAT SHALOM & CHODESH TOV

Nachman Kahana

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