

BS"D Parshiot Bo-Be'shalach

5783

Self-Esteem

Shemot 12:35:

וְיִשְׁאָלְךָ מִזְרָחָךְ וְיַעֲשֶׂה כָּל-עַמּוֹד וְיַעֲשֶׂה כָּל-עַמּוֹד
וְיַעֲשֶׂה כָּל-עַמּוֹד וְיַעֲשֶׂה כָּל-עַמּוֹד וְיַעֲשֶׂה כָּל-עַמּוֹד

The Israelites acted in accordance with the words of Moshe; they borrowed from the Egyptians vessels of silver and gold and clothing.

Rashi explains that the newly freed slaves preferred the clothing over the gold and silver, according to the principle that in a verse that contains a string of items the ones that appear later are the preferred.

What can we learn from this seemingly “innocent” verse that the Jews appreciated the gifts of clothing more than gold and silver?

The repeated strategy of anti-Semitic nations is the final and total annihilation of Jews and Judaism. Their initial tactic is to dehumanize the Jew by destroying his self-esteem, thus making it easier to destroy his body.

It began with Aisav, twin brother of our father Ya'akov, passed down to the Egyptian Paros, then to Hitler, Stalin and the Arabic speaking Moslems.

As the Midrash in parashat Vayaitzeh relates:

At the request of his parents, Ya'akov leaves for his uncle Lavan's home to meet his "besheret" (wife to be). But unlike Eliezer, who showered Rivka and her family (including her money-hungry brother, Lavan) with exquisite gifts, Ya'akov arrives penniless.

Rashi (chapter 29:11) explains that Ya'akov left his parent's home with lavish gifts but was "relieved" of them in a very distressing manner.

When Aisav learned that his brother had left their parents' home, he sent his loyal son, Eliphaz, to murder him. Upon meeting Ya'akov, Eliphaz apologizes for what he was about to do, but *ke'bud av* (paternal obedience) is a mitzvah, which, in his evil mind takes precedence over the murder of his uncle. When seeing that his nephew was taking this "mitzva" seriously, Ya'akov suggested that they "talk things over". He suggests a way that Eliphaz could fulfill his father's wishes and yet permit Ya'akov to live. Ya'akov quotes a euphemism (later brought in the Yalkut Shimoni Midrash, Bereishiet 82) "Ani Chashuv Ke'mayt" – an impoverished (in those days) person is as good as dead.

So Ya'akov offered Eliphaz all the possessions he had intended for his future bride, rendering Ya'akov a penniless pauper. Eliphaz accepts the offer and returns home, happy in the knowledge that he had fulfilled his father's wishes.

What transpired in the home of Aisav, upon Eliphaz's return?

Aisav: "Did you kill Ya'akov as I directed?"

Eliphaz: "Dear father, yes, and no".

Aisav: "This is a matter too serious for sophistry; he is either alive or dead – which is it?"

Eliphaz: "He is dead and alive."

Eliphaz, always the good son, goes to his father's library,

pulls out a Yalkut Shimon, and says, “I took all his money. And look for yourself, the Midrash states that an impoverished person is as good as dead”.

At first glance, Eliphaz appears to be dysfunctional if he believed that his father would accept this; in fact, Eliphaz was a genius that knew very well the workings of his father’s evil mind.

Aisav: “Ya’akov deceived me twice in the past, now he is doing it to my son!”

Eliphaz: “Dear Father, listen a moment. Had I killed Ya’akov, it would have been a great time for celebration, but for how long? A week? A month? A year? But after a while, you would have gotten used to the new reality in your life and the thrill would be gone. What I have done will be a constant source of simcha for you. Just think: every time you sit down to a sumptuous meal, Ya’akov will be scrounging in the garbage dumps for a potato peel (picture a scene from Auschwitz); every cold winter night, when you are warm under your thick feather quilt, Ya’akov will be searching for a street grating to keep warm from the escaping heat of the subway below; when you are surrounded with your 400 loyal men, Ya’akov will be a social reject, living the life of a recluse.”

“Dear father, to disgrace, degrade, demoralize, degenerate and destroy Ya’akov’s sense of self value until his dying day, is so much more pleasurable than the fleeting thrill of hearing of his death.”

Aisav realizes that he had succeeded in educating Eliphaz, and he is now properly prepared to be the father of Amalek. Aisav closes his eyes in deep satisfaction in the knowledge that the lessons will be handed down faithfully to all his generations, that Ya’akov is to be forever a non-entity, an “unter-mensch” (dehumanized).

The degradation of Ya'akov and his future Jewish descendants explains Aisav's behavior in parashat Vayishlach. The brothers prepare to meet after an absence of 22 years. The Torah relates that Aisav ran to Ya'akov and kissed him. Our rabbis explain that Aisav intended to kill him, but at the last moment he kissed Ya'akov. What made him change his mind?

When Aisav saw Ya'akov and his entire family prostrated on the ground before him, he savored the delight of once again seeing Ya'akov ground into submission. The precedent begun by Eliphaz, that it is far better to degrade Ya'akov than to murder him, was experienced again by Aisav.

The lesson of Aisav and Eliphaz has been incorporated into the psyche of their descendants until this very day. The thrill of degrading the Jew is what motivates Christianity and Islam to this day.

The German murder machine could have done the job more simply and cost-efficiently had they used different methods. But the descendants of Amalek chose to first bring the Jews into the squalor of the Ghetto, where we lost our self-respect (I use the pronouns "we" and "our" because had we been in Europe at the time, we too would have been victims). Cattle cars transported us, and after days and weeks of thirst, hunger, and disease, we were taken down by whips and dogs to the hundreds of camps spread over the length and breadth of Europe. We were reduced to sub-human levels by medical experimentation and the branding of numbers on our bodies. And when the Goyim had had their fill of our degradation, we were gassed and thrown into huge pits.

The Germans were avid proteges of the ancient Egyptians who set the precedent of degrading the Jewish individual and nation to the point where just before the Exodus, 80% of the Jews rejected the thought of freedom, choosing rather to remain in Egypt. Their spirits were so degraded that even the uplifting experiences of the ten plagues could not ignite

their tortured souls.

The remaining 20% who decided to follow Moshe into the desert took with them the wealth of Egypt which included, as related in the above pasuk, gold and silver; but the preferred items were the clothing.

This is the message of the pasuk! A slave gives no thought to his external appearance. In the 210 years of Egyptian slavery, as in the German extermination camps, the color and design of the thin rags that the Jews wore were not the subject of discussion among the suffering Jews.

In the days before emancipation, the Egyptians presented the Jews with gifts of gold and silver and clothing: the Jews treasured the clothing most. Because the clothing was the first sign of their sense of freedom; of their feeling of "self," of their humanity. The discarding of their slave rags opened the way to sense their individuality which was denied them for hundreds of years.

In our time, when the depth of suffering our people underwent became known, there descended upon our nation feelings of grief, sorrow, misery, dejection, inferiority and disbelief; and above all the big question – where was HaShem?

Many Jews, including those who did not suffer the horrors of the Shoah, were depressed to the point of rejecting Judaism. They were at that time at the same level of desperation as were the Jewish slaves in Egypt.

Those who followed Moshe became uplifted when seeing the miracles that HaShem had wrought for them, and their feelings of self-value were restored. Their new hope for life was expressed in the desire to restore the values and culture they had only heard of, regarding Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. Now was the time to change appearances by donning the clothing of freemen. Their holy spirit returned, and they were prepared to face the challenges that lay ahead in the threatening

desert.

The above quoted pasuk had profound meaning for our ancestors when discarding the shackles of slavery, but it also does for us 3300 years later.

There is an ongoing controversy among our religious leaders as to the relevance of the Medina in our anticipation of total redemption.

Indeed, the Medina was born and exists by miracles, and we all agree that it is not the epitome of perfection; but it is HaShem's "messenger" to save His chosen people from spiritual and national extinction; an expression of newfound pride after 2000 years of sadistic cruelty. the Medina for our generation is the parallel of the clothing the Jews received in Egypt that propelled the newly freed Jews from slavery to feelings of self-worth.

The Medina drew us out of the malaise of sadness, anger and pessimism that engulfed the Jewish nation after learning of what had happened in Europe, much like the ten plagues restored our ancestor's spirits in Egypt.

A Jew can walk with head held high in New York, Moscow and Berlin because of the Medina. The anti-Zionists in Meah Sh'earim and Williamsburg can shout against the Medina because deep down they know that the Medina in a time of disaster will take them in.

To be free de jure but physiologically feel subjugated is to be subjugated. To be free but still wear the clothing of a slave, one is in reality a slave. To survive the holocaust but remain in the blood-soaked lands of torment, is to relive every moment the pain of yesterday.

HaShem opened the gates of Eretz Yisrael for us to escape the lands of Aisav and Yishmael and return to His holy land. To close the pitiful chapter of our exile and open a new volume

of hope and renewal of our unique relationship with the Creator.

We are living in the most momentous period of Jewish history where we will merit to see the step-by-step realization of HaShem's blessings for Am Yisrael in our status of HaShem's chosen people.

וְיַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה כָּל־אָמֵן כַּאֲמֵן כַּאֲמֵן כַּאֲמֵן כַּאֲמֵן כַּאֲמֵן כַּאֲמֵן

For out of Zion shall go forth Torah and the word of HaShem from Yerushalayim

(Yeshayahu 2:3)

Shabbat Shalom

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