



*The Aramean (Lavan) sought to do away with my father Ya'akov, who eventually went down to Egypt with his small family, who grew there to become very numerous.*

*The Egyptians mistreated and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labor.*

*Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression.*

*And delivered us from out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great fear and with signs and wonders.*

*He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey*

*And now I bring the first fruits of the soil that you, Lord, have given me.”*

## **A Chosen Nation**

Later in the parasha, Moshe announces before the nation (26,18-19):

וְהָאֵלֹהִים אָמַר הַיּוֹם אֲנִי אֵלֹהִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא אֵלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים  
:וְאֵלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים

וְהָאֵלֹהִים אָמַר הַיּוֹם אֲנִי אֵלֹהִים לְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא אֵלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים  
וְאֵלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְאֵלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים וְאֵלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים

*And the Lord has declared this day that you are His nation, His treasured possession as He promised, and that you are to keep all His commands.*

*To raise you above all the other nations He has made, in praise, fame and honor and that you will be a people holy to the Lord your God, as He promised.*

These two citations from our parasha are intended (among other things) to inscribe within our conscious and unconscious selves the awareness that we, as the Creator's chosen nation, are not only different, but better and holier than all others.

This realization is meant to produce within the Jewish people what is known in modern Ivrit "rosh gadol" – a broad, encompassing, creative, enterprising and conceptual mind – a mind that has no patience for the conventional, insipid, mundane, trite or unimaginative aspects of this world. Truly we are a chosen people born from Avraham and Sarah; Yitzchak and Rivka; Ya'akov and Rachel, Leah, Bilha and Zilpa, who lives physically in this world but is spiritually and intellectually connected to the world beyond.

## **The Rosh Gadol vs. the rosh katan**

The Days of Awe are quickly approaching. It is that time when we must begin to appraise, consider, measure, judge and list our actions and thoughts of the past year(s).

If I may draw upon my own experience, I can say that the "mother of all sins" – and the prime mover of all others – is "rosh katan" the opposite of "rosh gadol".

"Rosh katan" is a narrow, restricted state of mind when a Jew negates his eternal and unique spiritual status as was revealed to us by HaShem at Mount Sinai, and seeks to draw closer to foreign cultures and nullifies his historical mission of "tikun olam" – universal reformation.

Rosh katan is illustrated in a short Yiddish story by Y.L. Peretz called Bonche Shveig – Bonche the silent.

*Bonche had a terrible life. Ill and overworked; never loved or respected by anyone. But despite it all, he never uttered*

*a word of complaint to HaShem or to man. He was indeed Bonche the silent.*

*Bonche died and was received in Heaven with great honor by myriads of angels. The officiating angel said to Bonche: "We have witnessed your behavior these 70 years on earth. Never a complaint; never an accusation. Now it is your time to speak out. You may request anything you wish.*

*Bonche thought for a moment, and replied: "I want solitude and quiet".*

*The angels began to cry.*

*The angels cried when they saw how life's experiences had snuffed out the Godly spirit given to this man at childbirth, who wishes no more than to be left alone.*

Life's experiences have turned great parts of the Jewish nation, including many spiritual leaders in the galut, from yesterday's spiritual giants to today's "rosh katan," – a people who desire quiet and serenity.

## **The Silence of the rosh katan**

Do you recognize these names: Shlomo ben Yosef, Dov Gruner, Mordechai Alkachi, Yechiel Drezner, Eliezer Kashani, Yaakov Weiss, Avshalom Chabiv, Meir Nakari, Meir Feinstein and Moshe Barazani?

No? Herein lies the problem.

I recall that one day, while a high school student in Yeshivat Rabbeinu Ya'akov Yosef (RJJ), our rabbi offered examples of the behavior of rabbis of yesteryear, whose qualities we should attempt to emulate. That rabbi once received a letter

with an un-cancelled stamp. He purchased a stamp at the post office and tore it up! He would also pick up stray pieces of paper in the bet midrash so that no one else would have to bother to do so.

All nice things, and in fact I try to emulate his conduct to the best of my ability to this day. However, while listening to my very learned and fine rabbi, I was troubled by what he was saying.

Let's return to the above mentioned list.

Shlomo ben Yosef, Dov Gruner, Mordechai Alkachi, Yechiel Drezner, Eliezer Kashani, Yaakov Weiss, Avshalom Chabiv, Meir Nakari, Meir Feinstein and Moshe Barazani. Who are they??

These are the 10 Martyred underground fighters who were hanged by the brutish British in the struggle against the British mandate over Eretz Yisrael.

I sat in the class and asked myself why the rabbi had chosen the stories of the stamp and the litter for us to emulate, when in our generation there are heroes of Biblical proportion whose willingness to sacrifice for the Jewish people was so astounding, such as the ten martyred young men who gave their lives so that the Jewish people would once again be able to return home to our Promised Land?

(I was aware of their great sacrifice and of the struggle which had been raging in Eretz Yisrael against the British, because in the 1940s my father was involved in the purchase of weapons and sending them clandestinely to Eretz Yisrael after the United States imposed an arms embargo on the nascent Jewish state).

A while after the above-mentioned class, the Sinai Campaign broke out when Israel was at war with Egypt. I was expecting the rabbi and the rosh yeshiva to speak to us about the war and to offer prayers for the success of the Jewish army in

Eretz Yisrael. But on the following morning, the student body was welcomed with a deafening silence and stupefaction regarding what was happening at that very time in the Holy Land.

At the time, as a teenager, I was unable to articulate what I was seeing and was not hearing. Later, I realized that the problem could be diagnosed as “rosh katan”. My rabbis were exemplary people, but the historical progression of Am Yisrael was too much for them to fathom. It was like trying to fit 10 people into a 5-passenger car – it just doesn’t work.

## Connecting a Jewish Heart to a Jewish Brain

A nation regarding which our parasha states:

*“I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come to the land the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us.*

*And the Lord has declared this day that you are his nation, His treasured possession as he promised, and that you are to keep all His commands.*

*To raise you above all the other nations He has made, in praise, fame and honor and that you will be a people holy to the Lord your God, as He promised.*

How can a Jew stand by the wayside and not join in the rebirth of our national life in Eretz Yisrael? The answer is ROSH KATAN.

The quickly changing history of our people and of the world is too much for most Jews to fathom. This was what Moshe was thinking when he saw the behavior of many people in his time; when they worshipped the Golden Calf and when they refused to

enter the Land – their inability to inculcate the rapid changes into our national life and its repercussions on every individual.

In the past, I likened many of the spiritual leaders in today's galut to the Meraglim (scouts, spies) of the desert; but that was a mistake. The Meraglim had "rosh gadol" but their estimation of what the people were capable of at the time was erroneous. Many of the Jewish leaders in the galut today are simply victims of their environment and education which do not permit them to soar above their mundane everyday interests.

To put it simply: A potato farmer in Eretz Yisrael who serves in Tzahal and loves the Medina has a "rosh" far bigger than a math professor in Harvard.

A short story to conclude:

*A rav who was in frail physical condition came to a doctor for help. The doctor inquired into the rav's daily schedule, to which the rav replied that he builds bridges. At the doctor's skeptical look, the rav explained that he tries to build bridges that span from the brain to the heart. When the doctor asked if the work was difficult, the rav replied that that is the reason he is seeking medical help".*

How does one obtain a "Rosh gadol"? It is obtained by connecting a Jewish heart to a Jewish brain, which results in the delight of a Jewish neshama.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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