

Toldot 5776

BS"D Parashat Toldot 5776

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

No weapon forged against you will prevail

Yeshayahu 54,17:

אין יבא אשׁר יִסְּרֵם אֵימָרָה אֶתְכֶם וְיִשְׁפֹּט אֶתְכֶם
: 'אֵין אֵימָרָה אֶתְכֶם וְיִשְׁפֹּט אֶתְכֶם

No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me," declares the Lord.

In a broad sense, all of us are contemporaries of the personalities in this week's and last week's parshiot.

Last week's parasha, Chayai Sarah, ends with the death of Yishmael. This week's parasha Toldot begins with the birth of Ya'akov and Eisav. These three personalities and their descendants were and are the major "players" in world history – the Jewish nation, Christians and Moslems.

The three met in their lifetimes. Yishmael was 79 years old when Avraham died, and he came together with Yitzchak to bury their father, as is recorded in parashat Chayai Sarah. Yitzchak must have certainly brought his two sons, Ya'akov and

Eisav, to their grandfather's funeral where they met their Uncle Yishmael.

Yishmael, the "perch adam" (wild man), was savage and uncontrollable, as stated in the Torah. Eisav, the cool, conniving, devious murderer, who unlike his uncle Yishmael, would never blow himself up in a school or supermarket, waits patiently for his father's demise when he will murder his brother, Ya'akov.

World history was planned by the Creator to follow the natural instincts of these three descendants of Avraham Avinu, with the rest of humanity waiting in the wings for their time to appear on the future stage of history.

History has shown that Yishmael and Eisav contrived to make parallel albeit different assaults on Ya'akov.

Yishmael the "perch adam" strives to destroy the moral teachings of Ya'akov by undoing the world order which Ya'akov, through the Torah, seeks to create. Eisav takes the devious, round-about path of creating a world in which there is no place for Ya'akov.

Islam has destroyed, among other things, the comfortable, secure order of world travel, whereas now every traveler is suspect. Suspicion has spread from the airport to the train station, to the local supermarket to the elevator and to the bet kneset. They crash into financial centers of nations to murder thousands. They destroy hotels and hospitals in India, thinking the more deaths they cause the better. Bali, Yemen, the underground in London, Chizbala and Chamas, and a passenger plane over the Sinai Peninsula.

Their wish is to return the world to the dark ages of ignorance and intolerance not only towards the stranger, but even towards their co-religionists who are just a bit different. Murder for them is not a dastardly crime. It is the fulfillment of the will of their demented Allah.

For Yishmael, death is superior to life. They fill the midrassas with millions of children, who will be trained to be human bombs to make the Kamikazes look like child's play. All of these efforts are a negation of what Ya'akov stands for. If they destroy the world order, they will have achieved victory over the Torah and the children of Ya'akov.

Eisav, compatible with his personality, seeks to uproot Ya'akov from our land in a much more elegant manner. Eisav schemes to murder Ya'akov while smiling at his brother in wait of their father's death.

While complimenting us on our democratic process and how advanced we are in all fields of academia, Eisav whispers in our ears that there will be no more construction in Yehuda and Shomron, that we are to deliver the Golan to the Syrians, to return to the borders of 1967, and to not react when thousands of rockets are fired at us. Moreover, we are to mark every produce of Shomron and Yehuda as such, so that the world should know not to purchase those products. Investment in Israeli projects should be divested. An academic boycott declared on Israeli schools of higher learning, the threat that Israeli military officers could be arrested when they step foot in the United Kingdom, and the key to Jonathan Pollard's cell thrown away in order to teach the uppity Jews to stay in their place. The list goes on and on ad nauseum.

If Yishmael has set his task to destroy all good by destroying world order, and has Eisav contrives to destroy his brother Ya'akov, what is the task of Ya'akov?

We were put in the world for the purpose of insuring that Man would not forget God, the Creator.

Were it not for Ya'akov and his children, the concept of God would be long forgotten.

Christianity would have diluted into atheism and Islam into avoda zara (idolatry).

Where is all of this heading?

Chazal (our Rabbis, of blessed memory) have revealed that the descendants of Yishmael will cause three wars: one on the sea, one on land and the third in the area of Yerushalayim. Yishmael will be defeated by the combined armies of Eisav, who in turn will be attacked by a nation from the end of the world (perhaps China). And at the end of days, the Jewish nation will be victorious over all our enemies, and the Holy Land will remain forever in our possession.

This is all written in the Zohar, at the end of parashat Va'ayra in the Book of Shemot and explained by the Malbim in his commentary to the Book of Yechezkel chapter 32 verse 17.

In the light of current events, I would not issue a life-insurance policy to any Jewish community in the galut. HaShem provided them with a 60-70 year window of opportunity to return home. So, from now on, what happens to the Jews of the galut is totally their own responsibility.

We, in Eretz Yisrael, will be like Noach in the ark. We will witness difficult days and the dangers will abound, but HaShem will bless His people in His holy land as Yitzchak blessed Ya'akov.

"No weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and this is their vindication from me," declares the Lord.

The choice to be a Ya'akov or an Aisav

I was recently asked of my feelings regarding American Open Orthodoxy in general, and the matter of rabbinic ordination of women, in particular.

My reply was a curt: These matters, as well as all others pertaining to galut Jewry, are irrelevant. The moment HaShem brought about the establishment of Medinat Yisrael, American Jewry and the other Jewish communities in the galut became irrelevant to the on-going and future history of the Jewish people. It is only a question of time, and no too long, when they will disappear.

Let me explain.

The Gemara (Yuma 83b) relates that Rabbi Meir was able to discern the basic character of a person from his name. And it is cited in various rabbinic works that when a parent names a child it is considered a nevu'a ketana – minor prophecy.

In our parasha, the world's most illustrious twins were named by their parents: Ya'akov and Aisav.

Aisav means wild growing grass, weeds or herb. Aisav is described as "a man of the field" – eesh ha'sadeh. Yaakov, 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'halim.

These descriptions serve to elaborate on the names and characters of the two brothers.

A field is an open area permitting unhindered free access to wherever one wishes to go. There is no obligation or responsibility to any one point or area in a 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 where the wind 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 and irritating.

This was Aisav – the man of the field. He discarded the responsibilities that come with being a first born, 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 (B’rayshiet 25:32):

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I will soon die, why do I need the birthright?

Aisav’s value system serves as the ideological basis of the reform movement with its logical, inevitable result – assimilation. Discard what is inconvenient, like Shabbat, kashrut, family purity, marrying within the Jewish nation – and certainly the embarrassment of a Jewish State in 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 in their ways – so Judaism must be discarded.

If lentils were good enough for Aisav, son of Yitzchak and Rivka, then shrimp and lobster are good enough for those to wish to escape the unfortunate fact of their being born as Jews.

Wild weeds grow in their 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 congregant, and counts them as Jews when one parent is Jewish. Wherever the money and convenience is, there you will find the many Aisavs of reform.

Ya'akov is different. He lived a structured life where consistency is the rule of the day. He is the "tent dweller" which demands conduct suitable for living in a demarcated life style. Structured davening (prayers) three times a day. Laws pertaining to what and when one eats. Moral and ethical conduct between people in accordance to 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 Aisv. 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 clear cut. Ya'akov clings to HaShem through Torah and mitzvot (commandments) from which he derives his lifeblood of existence, whereas Aisav sees his survival through his 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 true to conclude that the two cannot thrive together.

A Jew is either with the mainstream of God driven history where the galut has finished serving its historical purpose of "hosting" the exiled Jewish nation that had strayed too far from the Torah, or with the peripheral segments heading to 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

which dealt so cruelly with Am Yisrael, while the Jewish people will be under haShem's protective wing in Eretz Yisrael.

But confusion is king. Not much different from the time of Chanuka, which we will be celebrating this month. 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 faith – 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 200 years. And it is the mesirat 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 to be Ya'akov or Aisav. To pick up the gauntlet of the strong and courageous or to back off from the responsibility of a bechor.

The choices are: To join in the struggle to rebuild our nation in Eretz Yisrael or to cringe in the corner behind the apron strings of one's fears.

It is not easy to be a "Ya'akov" in a world surrounded by Aisavs, but it is the Ya'akov's who survive and guarantee the eternal existence of Am Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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