

Va'etchanan 5776

BS"D Parashat Va'etchanan 5776

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

The Orthodox who are suffering from Aisavitic fatigue

Harav David Lau (shlita), the Ashkenasi Chief Rabbi of Israel, in a public appearance last week declared that the Reform and Conservative movements are responsible for the rampant, untamed epidemic of assimilation in the US. In his words, there were approximately 6 million Jews in the US at the end of the Second World War, and statistically speaking they should have grown by now to be at least 45 million (the present number is given at between 5-6 million of which half are non-halachic, either because of Reform and Conservative non-halachic conversions or their recognition of a child born to a Jewish father and gentile mother as a Jew – NK).

Aisav, the world's first Reform Jew

The Gemara (Yuma 83b) relates that Rabbi Meir was able to discern the basic character of a person from his name. It is cited in various rabbinic works that when a parent names a child, it is considered a nevu'a ketana – minor prophecy. So much so that there are people who, while holding the baby,

read lists of names at a brit (circumcision ceremony); and when the baby opens his eyes, it is a sign that that particular name touched the soul of the child.

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

Aisav means wild growing grass, weeds or herbs. He 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. Ya'akov is described as "the dweller of the tents" – yoshev o'halim.

A field is an open area permitting unhindered 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 on how the wind scattered the seeds.

Open fields have no order nor 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 firstborn, selling it for a pittance. He returned from the field so tired that he implored his brother Ya'akov to feed him lentils. The details were a drag on him. Just give him the pleasures without the effort.

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

:אֵיבֹב אֶמָּוּת וְלָמָּוּת לָמָּוּת לָמָּוּת לָמָּוּת לָמָּוּת לָמָּוּת לָמָּוּת לָמָּוּת לָמָּוּת לָמָּוּת

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

Aisav is the spiritual father of the breakaway, rebellious movements within Judaism which seek to destroy its progenitor, as a cancer cell kills its host.

Discard what is inconvenient – 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 with one's 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 who wish to escape the unfortunate fact of their being born Jews. The wild weeds grow in their temples in the form of same-sex marriages, the “spiritual leader” who performs Joey and Mary's wedding together with the local minister, and the reform leader who services the whims of his congregants by counting them as Jews when the paternal 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 was the rule of the day. He was the “tent dweller” which demanded conduct suitable for living a demarcated lifestyle – structured davening (prayers) three times a day, dietary laws, moral and ethical conduct between people in accordance with the value system revealed by HaShem, and accepting responsibility without 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 between Ya'akov and Aisav is clear. Ya'akov clings consistently to HaShem through Torah and mitzvot (commandments) from which he derives his lifeblood of existence. To pick and choose those parts of Judaism that suit him are not an option for Ya'akov.

Aisav has no need for HaShem. He is the master of his own life and future. He is repelled by discipline; he rebels against consistency. His is the free spirit of the field and the nihilism of the jungle.

Now with the distinction between the God-fearing, responsible and consistent Ya'akov and the anarchistic, hedonistic Aisav so clear, it would be true to conclude that the two could not live together. One is either in the "Orthodox" camp of Ya'akov or in the assimilated "Reform-Conservative" camp of Aisav.

Oh that things would be so clear cut, because there can be a generation where the God-fearing students of Ya'akov share in the boundless backwoods of Aisav. It can occur in a generation when HaShem places great challenges before the Jewish nation. It can be when a segment of "Orthodox" Jews escape their national responsibilities with flimsy excuses based on so-called Torah principles, when in fact their evasion of responsibility stems from personal **Aisavitic fatigue** and desire for solace and comfort. These "Orthodox" are the ones who are providing the break-away movements with a defense plea in the heavenly court to counter the accusation that they picked and chose the more desirable parts of Judaism.

Four times in the Book of Devarim alone (chapters 6,18; 12,29; 16,20 and 26,1), HaShem commands the Jewish nation to inherit and settle the Land. Yet we find the great majority of American Orthodox Jews living happy, conscience-free lives in the US. If the Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox are permitted to pick and choose the mitzvot they prefer, why should the Reform and Conservatives not have that privilege?

At this time in our history, HaShem has placed before His children the enormous challenge of restoring our national independence within the borders of Eretz Yisrael, in preparation for the next stage of world history. That stage will witness the execution of God's justice upon those nations who dealt so cruelly with Am Yisrael, while we will be under HaShem's protective wing in Eretz Yisrael.

Each Jew is again faced with the choice to be a Ya'akov or an Aisav; to pick up the gauntlet of the strong and courageous or to back off from responsibility. The choice is either to join in the struggle to rebuild our nation in Eretz Yisrael or to reject our birthright out of fear or a desire for material comforts.

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

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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