

Vayaishev and Chanuka 5781

BS"D Parashat Vayaishev and Chanuka 5781

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Strength and Conquest

Much like a motion picture which is composed of thousands of individual frames passing before the viewer's eye, life too consists of a series of individual time frames of 70 years ("The span of our life is 70 years or with strength 80 years" – Tehillim 90:10). And just as one cannot understand the plot of a movie from a fleeting glance, one cannot decipher HaShem's intent in history from one- or two-time frames or even from a thousand years.

Our parasha relates that Yosef found his brothers in the Valley of Dotan, not far from Shechem. After removing his many-colored cloak, the nine brothers (not counting Yosef, or Reuven and Binyamin who were with Ya'akov at the time) involved in the betrayal lowered Yosef into a pit of snakes and scorpions, before selling him to the Ishmaelites and Midianites, as it says, "Yosef followed his brothers and found them at Dotan" (Genesis 37:17).

On Yom Kippur and on Tish'a Be'Av, we read the heart-breaking saga of the ten martyred rabbis who were cruelly murdered by the Romans, but in fact were divinely sentenced to death for the 1500-year-old sin of Yosef's having been sold into slavery. We weep over the fate that befell these great men and the implications it has had for the Jewish People. Yet, HaShem's ways are mysterious, and no one can fathom the

thoughts of the Creator, whose gaze encompasses all generations from Adam to the last man on earth.

The then Mufti of Yerushalayim spent the years of World War Two in Berlin, with his mentor Hitler. The two entered into an agreement: the Mufti would enroll thousands of Moslems from Bosnia and its related areas into the ranks of the S.S.; In return, the Germans, after conquering Palestine, would construct a major death camp where the Jews of the Middle East would be brought to be murdered. But, in November 1942, General Rommel was defeated at the battle of Al Alamein and the murderous plan was averted. The site earmarked for the camp was the very same Valley of Dotan cited above.

The pieces now fit together.

The death of the Ten Martyrs was an atonement for the sale of Yosef. However, the Mufti and the Germans could never have known that the murder of the Ten Martyrs was sufficient to appease the demands of Strict Justice; so that in our time, 2000 years later, calamity would be averted in the Valley of Dotan.

The composers of the Yom Kippur liturgy included the saga of the ten Martyred Rabbis to deliver the incredible, inconceivable and irrational message that yesterday's tragedies pave the way for today's redemption, which only HaShem is capable of performing. Including the overwhelming tragedy of the Shoah which paved the way for the return of Am Yisrael to the holy land through the incredible creation and survival of Medinat Yisrael; which only HaShem is capable of performing. And the ongoing tragedy of 6000 years of Man's inhuman actions towards his fellow man will pave humanity's return to Gan Eden, which only HaShem is capable of performing.

HaShem behind the scenes

Midrash Raba (Beraishiet 85) describes the mood in the house of Ya'akov after the selling of Yosef:

The tribes (brothers) were occupied with what they had done in selling Yosef (their conscience); Yosef was occupied with his (loin) sack and mourning; Reuven was occupied with his sack and mourning; Ya'akov was occupied with his sack and mourning; Yehuda was occupied with finding a wife, and the Almighty was occupied with creating the light of the Mashiach.

In every situation in life, as with the sale of Yosef, there is the subjective interpretation of events as viewed by those involved, but also, and more significantly, there is the will of HaShem as He directs the affairs of human beings while standing unobserved behind the curtains “creating the light of the Mashiach”.

In parashat Vayishlach, the brothers Shimon and Levi annihilate the entire population of the city of Shechem. What was HaShem's intention in bringing about this seemingly over-aggressive, unbalanced, asymmetric, excessive, disproportionate Goldstonian reaction by nice Jewish boys?

I suggest:

Avraham Aveinu arrived in Eretz Yisrael at a time when the land was occupied by the pagan descendants of Cham, son of

Noach. There were cultures and sub-cultures of avoda zara (idolatry), each according to the family breakdown into the ten “nations,” of Canaani, Chieti, Emori, etc.

Avraham began to advance the teachings of monotheism with much success. He established a yeshiva and a hotel-restaurant where many people gathered to hear the word of God. This was obviously not to the liking of the religious and political establishment of the times, for Avraham was undermining the core beliefs of the people by introducing God and morality, touching on matters such as family, law, treatment of slaves, and much more. But now the charismatic Avraham and his wife Sarah are long gone. Yitzchak is old and unable to see. Ya’akov, the ben Torah, has not been seen in Eretz Yisrael for over twenty years. The only relevant descendant of Avraham is Aisav, with whom the idolaters can get along fabulously, since Aisav is one of their own. So, for all intents and purposes, Yiddishkeit is no longer present in the holy land, and the natives could return to their old ways, uninterrupted by pangs of conscious brought about by those “holy-than-thou” Jews.

Then one day, Ya’akov reappears in Eretz Yisrael with his family and possessions. His arrival could have been like that of the chassidim and chalutzim 100 and 200 years ago, when they bought “a dunam here and a dunam there,” a house here and a house there, with no great message signaling their arrival. However, HaShem speaks to people in the language that they understand. To us HaShem speaks as a father teaching Torah to his children; to gentiles He speaks in the language that they appreciate – the language of strength and war.

Ya’akov and Judaism have returned home, and the occupiers have to learn that it is no longer “business as usual”. HaShem, as the ultimate playwright, brings about Ya’akov’s return on the stage of history in an explosive manner; the city of Shechem is decimated. Ya’akov explodes upon the stage of history – this is what gentiles understand.

When later in his life, Ya'akov and his 69 relatives leave the holy land to join with Yosef in Egypt, the land is once again devoid of Judaism. Four hundred years later the nation returns under the leadership of Moshe and Yehoshua. Moshe defeats the two super-powers of Og King of Bashan, and Sichon King of Emori, and Yehoshua continues to destroy 31 city-states in Eretz Yisrael.

We again entered the land not by “dunam here and dunam there,” but in the way that the gentiles understand – strength and conquest.

For two thousand years, the main body of the Jewish nation was in exile with only a small number of Jews left in the land, so that Judaism was not the dominant force here.

Then came the holocaust and the enemies of our people were certain that it was only a matter of time when the world would be “free” from the shackles of Judaism as the Jewish people dwindle and vanish.

Then in 1948, we again leapt onto the platform of history with an eruption that has caught the attention of the world until this very day. We drove back seven standing armies of Arab states in the War of Independence. And we have been victorious in the most dramatic way in all our other wars. And in those conflicts where Tzahal did not excel, it was only because we imposed self-restraint on the fighters.

Indeed, HaShem speaks to all in the language that they understand. We understand the kol demama daka (the soft gentle voice of HaShem), but the Aisavs of the world are impressed only by strength – with which Ya'akov is endowed when necessary.

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Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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