

# Vayaitzai 5774

## BS"D Parashat Vayaitzai 5774

### Part A:

Four historical episodes occurred, apart in time and place, but very similar.

1) The day of freedom was determined by HaShem to be the 15th of Nisan, when millions of Am Yisrael would leave Egypt, thereby terminating 210 years of debilitating slavery, to become the Creator's chosen nation. However, 80% of the people refused to venture into the treacherous desert and died during the week-long plague of darkness.

An invitation by HaShem had been rejected by most of His people.

2) When Rechav'am, son of King Solomon, ascended the throne, Yeravam ben Navat led the northern tribes in seceding from the united kingdom of David and Shlomo. In order to solidify the secession, Yeravam created a surrogate Bet Hamikdash in the cities of Bet El and Dan, and prohibited the people of the north from going up to Yerushalayim.

The Mishna in Tractate Ta'anit states that the 15th of Av was one of the two happiest days in the Jewish calendar, with the other being Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The Gemara explains that on this day, Hoshea ben Ela, the last king of the ten northern tribes, rescinded the 200-year-old prohibition enacted by Yeravam ben Navat, and permitted the people of the northern tribes to go up to Yerushalayim.

If Hoshea was such a great man, asks Rav Kahana in the Yerushalmi Ta'anit, why during his reign was Shalmanetzer, King of Assyria, permitted to conquer and exile all the Jews of the northern tribes whose whereabouts are not known to this

day?

The Talmud answers that Hoshea ben Ela opened the way to Yerushalayim – BUT NO ONE CAME. Hoshea ben Ela was personally held accountable for not imposing his authority by forcing people to renew their covenant with the holy city and for the sin of the people not reuniting with Yerushalayim.

Another invitation by HaShem had been rejected by His people.

3) Last Shabbat, the 2nd of November, was the 96th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. In 1917, a letter was sent from the United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to Baron Walter Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community, for transmission to the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland. It begins:

*His Majesty's government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object...*

The British permitted unlimited immigration until the mid-1920s. In 1919, the number of Jews who came was 1806; in 1923 it rose to 8175; and from the Balfour Declaration until 1939, the number of olim was less than 300,000. By then, the Holocaust descended upon the Jewish people. Yet another invitation by HaShem had been rejected by His people.

These are the facts. I leave it to you, dear reader, to draw the conclusions.

4) In 1967, HaShem invited Am Yisrael to return home, when in the aftermath of our miraculous military victories, He restored Yerushalayim, Yehuda, Shomron and the Golan to Jewish sovereignty. There should have been a mass aliya of one million Jews to settle these lands. However, the number of olim was very dismal.

Once again, an invitation by HaShem had been rejected by His people.

And the result is a devastating holocaust – not one of bloodshed, because the Jewish nation could not bear another Shoah. This holocaust is one of assimilation where over 70% of non-orthodox Jews in the U.S. and other parts of the world are marrying gentiles.

As profound as the essence of Judaism is, it can be stated succinctly as follows: HaShem chose the Jewish nation and commanded us to perform His mitzvot in Eretz Yisrael.

Any deviation from this formula is a perversion of the Torah.

In this parasha, our father Ya'akov experienced two dreams. In the first, Ya'akov sees HaShem's angels ascending to heaven and descending to this world. In the second, he sees how he can increase the number of animals in his herd.

The enormous difference between the dreams is that the first one with ascending and descending angels occurred when Ya'akov was in Eretz Yisrael, but in chutz la'aretz even the great Ya'akov dreamed of animals.

## **Part B:**

### **Toldot and Chanuka**

#### **Aisav, the world's first Reform Jew**

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

Aisav, whose name means wild-growing grass, weeds or herbs, is described as "a man of the field" – *eesh ha'sadeh*. A field is an open area permitting unhindered access to the passerby, with no obligation or responsibility to remain in one point or area in a field. If it becomes uncomfortable, the passerby is free to move on. A field contains any assortment of weeds,

grass and herbs intertwined or growing alone depending on how the wind has scattered the seeds.

The open fields have no order – no law, except that of the jungle.

The passerby can just pick and choose whatever appeals to him at that given moment and discard what is disturbing and irritating.

This was Aisav – the man of the field. He discards the responsibilities that come with being a firstborn and sells 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):

אֲנִי יָדָעִים אֲמָוֶת בְּיָמַי לָמָּה אֶחְשֶׁת לִּי בְּרִשְׁתְּךָ

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

Aisav is the spiritual father of the reform movement and assimilation. They discard what is inconvenient – like Shabbat, kashrut, family purity, marrying within the Jewish nation. They are surely embarrassed by 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.

If lentils were good enough for Aisav, son of Yitzchak and Rivka, then shrimp and lobster are good enough for them and their children. The wild weeds grow in their temples in the form of same-sex marriages, and the "rabbi" who performs Joey and Mary's wedding together with the local minister. The reform leader who services the whims of his congregants and

counts him as a Jew when his father is Jewish but not his mother. Wherever the money and convenience are, there you will find the many reform Aisavs.

The name Ya'akov is derived from the Hebrew *aikav* (heel) implying consistency – one foot follows the other with cadence and precision.

Ya'akov lived a structured life where consistency was the rule of the day. He is the “tent dweller” which demands conduct suitable for a demarcated lifestyle: structured davening three times a day; laws pertaining to what and when one eats; moral and ethical conduct between people in accordance with the value system revealed by HaShem; accepting responsibility without escaping through 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 of Ya'akov and Aisav is clear cut. Ya'akov clings to HaShem through Torah and mitzvot from which he derives his lifeblood of existence, whereas Aisav sees his survival through being able 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 that the distinction between the God-fearing, responsibility-taking Ya'akov and the anarchistic, hedonistic Aisav is so clear, it would be true to conclude that the two cannot thrive together. One is either in the “orthodox” camp of Ya'akov or in the reform, assimilated camp of Aisav.

But things are not that tidy.

There can be a generation where the God-fearing students of

Ya'akov share in the bitter waters of Aisav.

It can occur in a generation when HaShem imposes great challenges on the Jewish nation, but 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 weakness and Aisav's desire for solace and comfort.

At this time in our history, HaShem has placed before His children of 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 Divine justice upon those nations who 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 – to join with the Maccabim at the risk of his 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 because of the mesirat nefesh of those holy people that we celebrate during 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 choice is 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'akovs who will survive and guarantee the eternal existence of Am Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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