

Vayaitze – Vayaishev 5771

BS"D Parshiot Vayishlach and Vayaishev 5771

A: 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 idolators 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 "holier-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 leaped 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.

Parshat Vayaishev 5771



Dedicated to my brothers and companions in the holy land

At the beginning of the parsha, Rashi quotes the Midrash:



Ya'akov wished to sit (spend his final years) in tranquil serenity, when the episode of Yosef entered into his life

As HaShem explained to Ya'akov: "Is it not enough that the righteous are destined to enjoy eternal bliss in the next world, that they wish to experience serenity in this world too?"

For reasons that are beyond human understanding, HaShem decreed that there should be an uneven distribution of Jewish historic responsibility, as in our times, when so much has been placed on the shoulders of the so few in Eretz Yisrael. It is the few faithful and courageous who carry the heavy burden of restoring our nation to its former glory as HaShem's chosen people in the holy land.

We serve in the defense forces, as testified by the thousands of graves in our military cemeteries. The five and a half million of us have to support a full complement of national institutions, such as education, health, welfare, transportation, communications, and much more. We worry over the dry winters and near electricity shortages in the summers. Our homes are modest as are our cars. And the list is not short.

This is in contrast to the economic and financial situations of many of our brothers in chutz l'aretz who live in relative serenity. Their sons do not serve in the military. There are millions of gentile neighbors who carry the burden of supporting the country financially and militarily. Taxes are a nuisance but not a real burden. Vacations are hallowed traditions, whether to the Catskills or to Florida or to a great skiing resort. They don't have Hizballa breathing down their necks, or Hamas and Iran sharing a common border.

(This is analogous to the behavior of the brothers, when Yosef was calling out from the pit for help, and the pasuk says regarding the brothers' apathy (Beraishiet 37:25):



And they (the brothers) sat down to eat bread

However, when I see the life styles of our Jewish brethren in chutz la'aretz – and the more palatial and impressive the better – and then see the economic difficulties encountered by many people here, I am encouraged and even happy. Why?

The Midrash relates:



Yakum from Tzrurot, the nephew of Rabbi Yose ben Ezer of Tzraida, was riding his horse on Shabbat (halachically prohibited) and came across his uncle R. Yose ben Ezer who was being taken out by the Romans for execution. And he said to the rabbi: Look at the horse that my masters (the Romans) have given me and look at the horse that your master (HaShem) has given you (meaning: compare our two situations. I who deserted the Jews to become part of the occupying Romans am leading a great life, whereas you are going to be executed). And the Rabbi replied: If this is the delight that HaShem grants to those who deny His Torah (the nephew in this world), who cannot even imagine the great delight that HaShem

has prepared for those who are faithful to His Torah (in the world to come).

HaShem has bestowed great benefits to those who stubbornly cling to the galut while denying their Torah and historical responsibilities to return home, so who can even imagine the great delights that He will shower upon those who stubbornly cling to HaShem's Torah and fulfill their obligations to live in Eretz Yisrael despite the myriad difficulties they face.

We are the "Ya'akovs" of Jewish history who must encounter and overcome the many obstacles placed in our path along the journey to the final redemption. And we are also the "Yisraels" of Jewish history whose reward is beyond human comprehension.

Indeed, the spiritual rewards for mitzvot completed, as well as penalties for those not completed and for sins, are in the domain of the next world. Nevertheless, HaShem bestows in this world fragments of what the future holds in the next, as the Gemara states (Kedushin 40a) we are rewarded or punished in this world for the pairot (the secondary results of our acts) but the principle part is left for the future world.

For our self sacrifice in rebuilding our nation, HaShem will turn Eretz Yisrael into a virtual paradise. In the near future, we will be the most affluent nation in the world. The land is sitting upon one of the world's biggest natural mineral deposits of oil, gas and who knows what else.

Its just a matter of time!

Ya'akov Refuses to be Comforted

When hearing of the "death" of Yosef, Ya'akov rends his garments and begins the terrible experience of mourning for a son. His other children try to comfort him, but he cannot be comforted, as the pasuk (35) states:



All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. He said, "I will continue to mourn until I join my son in the grave." So his father wept for him.

We find a comparable pasuk with regard to Rachel who refuses to be comforted over the exile of her children (Yirmiyahu 31:14)



This is what the LORD says: "A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel is weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are not here."

It appears that Yirmiyahu is describing Rachel's sorrow in more horrific terms than the sorrow of Ya'akov.

The words "mourning and great weeping" are ascribed to Rachel, whereas by Ya'akov it says: "So his father wept for him".

Why is Rachel in a deeper stage of mourning than Ya'akov?

I suggest:

Ya'akov's soul knows that Yosef is longing to come home, so he is less aroused to cry.

Rachel's soul knows that there will be in the future millions of her exiled children who will not be interested in coming home.

Her mourning and grief are indeed more profound than that of Ya'akov.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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