

Vayechi 5771

BS"D Parashat Vayechi 5771

A: In God We Trust or We Trust God

Our parasha represents a milestone in the early history of the formation of the Jewish nation.

The last of the patriarchs, Ya'akov, is put to rest, as are his sons, the progenitors of the twelve tribes.

A new generation has arisen that only heard of the greatness of their ancestors, but did not personally experience their presence. There was an acute and intense spiritual descent between the generations.

Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov are deemed "avot" – the fathers of the nation who had direct contact with the Almighty and performed all the mitzvot of the future Torah on a voluntary basis.

Ya'akov's twelve sons were outstanding personalities who established the future roles of the distinct segments that would make up the Jewish nation: priesthood, monarchy, Torah erudition, etc.

But their children were well on the way to assimilation in Egyptian society, were it not for the enforced slavery that salvaged their distinct national identity.

(Interestingly, the Jews of the Soviet Union could not forget their Jewishness due to the fact that each one had the letter "J" imprinted in their identity cards, whereas in the freedom of the United States millions of Jews have totally assimilated).

Distinctions, even extreme ones, have always been a part of our history. It is because of this that we categorize our many generations into distinct and separate time frames: Judges,

Kings, Prophets, Tanna'im, Amora'im, Sevora'im, Geonim, Rishonim and Achronim. The distinctions are acutely discriminating from a halachic point of view. A member of a later time frame has no halachic standing when differing with a member of a former time frame: an Amora cannot overrule the halachic decisions of a Tanna.

Basic, inherent differences between Jews are not relegated to generation gaps only; they are found among our people living in the same generation in different lands and under different gentile influences.

The Jews who are integrated in Israeli society are vastly different than their brothers and sisters living in the galut. But what interests me mostly are the differences between the spiritual leaders in Eretz Yisrael and those in the galut.

Rabbis in the galut learn the same Torah as the rabbanim in Eretz Yisrael; the same texts of Talmud, Tosefot, Rambam, Shulchan Aruch etc. *(Although it is common knowledge that there exists an unbridgeable qualitative gap of Torah erudition, in favor of Eretz Ysrael).*

We perform the same mitzvot, with no difference in the tefillin or tzitzit that we wear or the mezuzot on our door-posts.

We recite the same liturgy in tefila, albeit with some differences. Most *(Orthodox)* synagogues in the US pray for the welfare of President Obama, but not for the welfare of Medinat Yisrael and the holy soldiers of Tzahal.

Our rabbanim and their rabbis both strive to live up to the Torah's dictate of loving and being in awe of HaShem. We both are dedicated to the future survival of the Jewish nation.

So wherein lies the differences between the rabbanim here and the rabbis in the galut? And the even larger question: Why are rabbis still in the galut?

I suggest it all centers around one word – **trust**.

Herein lies the great divide between the spiritual leadership in Eretz Yisrael and their followers, apart from those in the galut.

When one says “I **trust in** HaShem” (*as on the US bills “In God we trust”*) the implication is that one is certain that a specific promise made by HaShem will be kept. The promise of a Mashiach, of techiyat hamaitim (*resurrection*) and all HaShem’s commitments, as voiced by the prophets, will some day become realities. Because I believe in God and His integrity.

Whereas, the phrase “**I trust Hashem**” implies total, unqualified confidence that Hashem will be merciful and compassionate to His people Yisrael even when a specific promise was not made. Just as a child blindly trusts his parent’s dedication to his well-being.

One who lives in Eretz Yisrael with its myriad problems and enemies, voices a thunderous statement that he “trusts” that HaShem will be merciful to His loyal people here, even without a specific promise via a prophet.

But after hearing the fretful whining of so many spiritual leaders from the galut , especially from the US, the only conclusion that I can make is that they are suspicious of HaShem’s motives and intentions.

How many times have I heard rabbis and bnei Torah who are here for a year or less to fill their spiritual batteries, claim: “Who can predict what the future holds for the five and a half million Jews surrounded by hundreds of millions of primitive, hate obsessed Arabs and Moslems? Why should HaShem protect the Jewish State when a large minority of Jews there are less than traditional? Who says that the Medina is the end of the 2000 year old galut and beginning of the final redemption?

“Let’s play safe,” they tell their communities, “and build our

lives in Boro Park and Lakewood. What halachic right do we have to gamble with the lives of our children?"

As I said, religious leaders in the galut **trust in** HaShem but most do not **trust** HaShem. They are forever suspicious, apprehensive, cautious, doubtful, skeptical, and wary of what HaShem's quality of justice might produce.

Herein lies the huge gap between us in Eretz Yisrael and most of the religious leaders in the galut. We perceive the dangers, yet feel in our hearts that just as we have witnessed great miracles of salvation in these last 62 years, we shall be privileged to witness even greater ones in the future.

Most spiritual leaders in the galut cannot change because that is what they are – people of the galut, whose tunnel vision of Jewish history is seen through the aperture of a token.

The leaders of a people are a mirror of that society. Rarely will a leader be more altruistic or kinder than the norm of the people he leads. Jewish history of the last two thousand years is replete with tragic events. The tragic number of Jews who have assimilated in the last 62 years through inter-marriage is, according to those who deal in statistics, very close to the number of Jews murdered in the Holocaust.

If the good Jewish people in the galut will wait for their leaders to lead them to the promised land, we will, God forbid, find ourselves in a count-down towards another spiritual and physical tragedy in Jewish history.

So don't look towards your leaders. Go around them, and above them. It is now a matter of "every man (and family) for himself," to escape the galut and return to God's Promised Land to His chosen nation.

Siyum (concluding) of the Book of Beraishiet

At the close of the Book of Beraishiet our memory draws us

back to the very first comment of Rashi on the first word of the Torah "Beraishiet".

Rashi, based on the Midrash, explains that since the Torah is the law book revealed by HaShem at Mount Sinai to the Jewish people, it should naturally begin with the first law that HaShem commanded us to perform – the calculation of the month and years. And Rashi explains that the purpose of relating the episode of creation was to offset future claims of the nations that we, the Jewish people are living in Eretz Yisrael illegally and immorally.

Hence, HaShem dictated to Moshe the episode of creation to counter the gentile claim by saying that HaShem created the world, so it is His right to do with it whatever He wishes. And a major act of Hashem was to take the land away from the Canaanites and deliver it to the Jews for all time.

It appears that we did not progress very much in our relationship with the gentile world in the near 6000 years since the creation – we possess the land and they continue to claim we are usurpers.

In this battle for legitimacy, there is no room for neutrality. Either one is actively on the side of HaShem and if not then he is opposed to HaShem. It is not like a car where neutral is a position on the gear stick, or a sports game where there are time outs. It's a very Jewish thing where at any given moment one is either gaining mitzva merits or sinful demerits – one who just sits in an easy chair doing nothing other than fancying the scenery is guilty of bitul Torah (*wasting valuable time*).

I am afraid that we owe many gentile nations an apology for the bad PR that we cause them.

There are nations that back the Arabs' claim that we are occupiers of their lands, and we are angry at those nations.

When the American administration tips a bit towards the Arab view, American Jewish leaders shout to their constituents to inundate the White House with telegrams of protests, etc. One can even hear whispers in the background that those who advocate a more even-handed policy with the Arab side are anti-Semites and insensitive to the Jewish people who just barely survived the Holocaust.

However, in the name of good old American fair play, I have to come to their defense.

For example; The White House knows that it is improper to invite a delegation of Orthodox Jews to come on Shabbat, because the Jews believe that Shabbat is a God given command that cannot be compromised.

The White House also knows that when an Orthodox group does come the food must be kosher, because the Jews believe that kashrut is a God given command that cannot be compromised.

However, when respected rabbis, roshei yeshiva, grand-rabbis and Orthodox leaders show-up at the White House, the president and his advisors draw an undeniable conclusion: that in contrast to Shabbat and kashrut – which are God commanded uncompromising commandments – these rabbis and Jewish leaders are compromising on the matter of Eretz Yisrael by not living there. Hence, the compelling conclusion that Eretz Yisrael, in contrast to Shabbat and kashrut, is not a God given command. Therefore it should be treated not as a religious issue but one more political conflict like Bosnia or North Korea.

The responsibility of a rabbi is not less than that of a dayan (a judge) regarding whom the Gamara states, that when sitting in judgement, he must perceive himself as if a sword is being held right above his head, ready to do its work if the judge is lax in his judgement.

I say again: the very presence of rabbis in the galut at a time when the gates of the Holy Land are open is a chilul

HaShem, and gives credence and legitimacy to the evil claims of our enemies.

Perhaps we should introduce an oath to be taken by a new rabbi when receiving semicha (*ordination*). I suggest the Hebrew version of the one introduced by Hippocrates in Latin that was taken by new doctors:

“Primum non nocere” that means “First, do no harm”.



Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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