

Vayeira 5781

BS"D Parashat Vayeira 5781

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Four Eulogies

Excerpt from my book Reflections from Yerushalayim

The Talmud (Megilla 3a) makes reference to the Bible translation composed by the Mishnaic sage Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel, the most impressive disciple of Hillel (Succah 28a). The Talmud quotes a problematic verse in Zecharia 12:11:

"On that day, the eulogy in Jerusalem shall be as great as the eulogy over Hadad-Rimon in the plain of Megiddon."

Yet, in Scripture we do not find a man named Hadad-Rimon being eulogized in the plain of Megiddon.

Yonatan ben Uziel rendered this verse, "On that day, the eulogy in Jerusalem shall be as great as the eulogy of Achav bar Omri who was killed by Hadad-Rimon ben Tav-Rimon in Ramot Gilad, and the eulogy of Yoshiyahu ben Amon who was killed by Paro Chagira in the Valley of Meggido."

How did Achav and Yoshiyahu merit such impressive eulogies that they were used as examples of great eulogies which would be held in the future in Yerushalayim?

The problem is compounded regarding Achav, one of three kings regarding whom the Mishna in Sanhedrin 90a states that they

forfeited their portion in the World to Come, together with Yeravam ben Nevat and Menashe ben Chizkiyahu.

Achav and his Phoenician wife E'zevel hunted down and murdered all of HaShem's prophets, except for one hundred who were hidden away in caves by the righteous Ovadia (I Malachim 18:4). In addition, Achav spread idolatry into every Jewish home. Yet, despite all his evil deeds, he merited a eulogy reserved for the greatest figures among our people, because he was a revered and beloved leader. Achav brought his people wealth, waged the wars of Israel and expanded the Land's boundaries. The circumstances of his death illustrate his greatness as a leader. Achav took part in his last battle against Aram (today's Syria). He was standing tall in his command chariot, when an Aramean soldier named Na'aman shot a random arrow in the air that penetrated Achav's armor. The king could have left his command post to receive medical aid, but he refused lest his absence weaken his soldiers' determination – and by doing so, he bled to death. Achav was a beloved and admired king, but he was far from being a man of Torah.

King Yoshiyahu of Yehuda, by contrast, was righteous. In his lifetime, he initiated and supervised the renovation of the Temple, worked long and hard to eradicate idolatry, and renewed pilgrimages to Jerusalem at Pesach time. The Bible describes how, in his day, the Pesach celebrations achieved heights not seen since the times of Yehoshua bin Nun. Yoshiyahu, like Achav, was a faithful son of the Land of Israel. He was killed at Megiddo, while attempting to prevent the King of Egypt from traversing the Land on his way to fight Assyria. He mistakenly understood the Torah's promise that "a sword shall not pass through your land" (Vayikra 26:6) referred even to an allied sword.

We learn in Bava Kama that when Yoshiyahu's body was returned to Jerusalem, 36,000 people took turns holding the coffin on the way for burial. The Gemara there asks, "Wasn't the same

done for Achav?" It replies that a Torah scroll was placed on Yoshiyahu's coffin and everyone called out, "This one fulfilled what is written in here!" This act was not performed for Achav. Yoshiyahu, who feared HaShem, and Achav, the heretic, were beloved kings who fought for the glory of their people and Land.

The Prophet Zecharia foresaw that, in the future, two funerals would be held in Jerusalem whose eulogies would be on a par with those of Yoshiyahu and Achav.

Since the destruction of the Second Temple, the City of Jerusalem has not known such impressive funerals as those of my brother, Rabbi Meir Kahane and of Yitzchak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel. Rabin was not an Achav and my brother was not a Yoshiyahu, but in their lives we can identify patterns resembling those of the two kings.

Yitzchak Rabin was far removed from Torah and mitzvot, but like Achav, he dedicated his life to defending the Land of Israel. He was a leader whom many people respected and showed that respect by accompanying him to his final resting place.

My brother, Rav Meir, was a Torah scholar and a leader. He brought the plight of Soviet Jewry into the headlines and contributed greatly to the collapse of that wicked regime and to the opening of its gates to allow Jews to move to Israel. He learned Torah constantly and gave generously to charity. The number of participants at his funeral was estimated at over two hundred thousand people from all walks of life.

Rav Meir and Yitzchak Rabin represented disparate world views, and the circumstances of their leaving this world attest to their lives. Rabin was murdered on a Saturday night following Parashat Lech Lecha. Rav Meir was murdered a few days after Parashat Vayeira.

In Parashat Lech Lecha, Avraham asks HaShem, "May it be granted that Yishmael should live before You" (Bereishiet

17:18). Avraham defended his son Yishmael born to him by his wife Hagar.

In Parashat Vayeira, Sarah demanded that Avraham expel Yishmael, saying, “‘Drive away this maidservant together with her son. The son of this maidservant will not share the inheritance with my son Yitzchak!” (ibid., 21:10). Sarah could discern wickedness and licentiousness in Yishmael, and she knew her son Yitzchak could never coexist peacefully with him. HaShem commanded Avraham to honor Sarah’s request – Yitzchak and Yishmael would, indeed, never live together in peace.

Rabin, who was murdered just after Parashat Lech Lecha, advocated Avraham’s stance of “May it be granted that Yishmael should live before you.” He believed that these two nations could coexist side by side. To achieve that goal, he imported thousands of PLO murderers from Tunisia, equipping them with lethal weapons.

Rav Meir, who was murdered just after Parashat Vayeira, advocated Sarah’s approach that the souls of Yitzchak and Yishmael were forged from disparate worlds. Yitzchak was a Torah scholar, worthy to be brought as a sacrifice to HaShem. Yishmael, by contrast, was a wild man, who praised and extolled death over life.

History has proven that the dominant message of Parashat Vayeira is, indeed, that Yitzchak and Yishmael cannot coexist.

May the soul of both these Jewish leaders – Rav Meir and Yitzchak Rabin – be bound up in the bond of the living souls.

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Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

