

Vayera 5780

BS"D Parshiot Lech Lecha and Vayera 5780

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Four Eulogies

The Talmud (Megilla 3a) makes reference to the Bible translation composed by the Mishnaic sage Rabbi Yonatan ben Uziel, the most important 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 where in Scripture do we 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 will 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 HaShem's prophets, all but one hundred who were hidden away in caves by the righteous Ovadia (I Malachim 18:4), and in addition Achav implanted idolatry in every Jewish home. Yet, despite all his evils he merited a eulogy reserved for the greatest figures amongst 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). Standing tall in his command chariot, an Aramean soldier named Na'aman at random shot an 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 he bled to death. Achav was a beloved, admired king, but he was far from being a man of Torah.

King Yoshiyahu, 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, based on his understanding that 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?" and replies that a Torah scroll was placed on Yoshiyahu's coffin and everyone called out, "This one fulfilled what is written in here!" – an act 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 Kahana, and of Yitzchak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel.

Rabin was not Achav and my brother was not 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 they showed that respect by accompanying him to his final resting place.

Rav Meir was a Torah scholar and a leader. He brought the problem of Soviet Jewry into the headlines, 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.

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 borne to him by his wife Hagar. In Parashat Vayeira, Sarah demanded that Avraham expel Yishmael, saying, "'Drive away this maid-servant together with her son. The son of this maid-servant 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 near 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 P.L.O. murderers from Tunisia, equipping them with lethal weaponry.

Rav Meir, hy"d, 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, and Rav Meir was murdered just after Parashat Vayeira.

History has proven that the message of parashat Vayeira that Yitzchak and Yishmael cannot coexist is the dominant one.

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

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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