

Vayetze 5771

BS"D Parashat Vayetze 5771

Ya'akov arrives at the city of Ur Kasdim at the town's meeting place – the city well, just at the time when several shepherds were lingering around. When Ya'akov questioned them on their seeming indolence at the middle of the work day, they replied (Beraishiet 29:8-11):



“We can not (water the sheep),” they replied, “until all the flocks are gathered and (all the shepherds) will roll the stone from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep.”

And the Torah continues:



While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess.

When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of Laban, his mother's (Rivka) brother and the sheep that belonged to Laban, his mother's brother, Ya'akov approached (the well) and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered the sheep of Lavan his mother's brother.

“And rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well”. How could Ya'akov, the yeshiva bocher, roll away a huge stone that required the combined strength of many grown men?

I will return to this.

King Solomon wrote many things in his lifetime but, unfortunately, only several works remain today, including Shir

HaShirim (Song of Songs).

The illustrious Rabbi Akiva comments on this unparalleled magnum opus of King Solomon in the Mishna (Ya'adim 3:5):



All scriptures are holy, but Shir Ha'Shirim is the holy of holies.

No doubt, Rabbi Akiva's soul was moved by Shlomo Ha'Melech's description of HaShem's love for the Jewish people (8:6-7):



Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave.

It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away.

It is not surprising, that Rabbi Akiva was the one who was so touched by Shlomo HaMelech's description of love, because Rabbi Akiva knew that true love was indeed "a many splended thing".

The Gemara (Ketubot 63a) relates that the young and beautiful Rachel gave up her family, wealth and youth for love of Akiva, the shepherd.

She believed that he could be a Torah giant in the generation of Torah giants, and struggled alone for 24 years so that her Akiva could learn Torah in Yerushalayim without interruption.

At the end of that period, Akiva the shepherd, who was now the world renowned Rabbi Akiva, returned home to be reunited with his beloved wife.

The Gemara relates that he arrived with 24 thousand disciples, who, with all the town's people came out to honor the great Rabbi Akiva, including Rachel. Rachel approached her husband and bent down to kiss his feet, and when the ushers were pushing her back, Rabbi Akiva brought the crowd to silence. And standing before the throng of thousands of his students and others, Rabbi Akiva declared: "My Torah and your Torah are all in the merit of this woman".

What Shlomo Ha'Melech was saying which was so well understood by Rabbi Akiva was that the love HaShem feels toward Am Yisrael moves the Creator to perform mighty acts not within the framework of the natural world He created, just as the love of a man for a woman can move him to perform remarkable deeds.

Ha'Shem, in his love for Am Yisrael, changed the natural order that He Himself created: The ten plagues, splitting of the Red Sea, the Manna and Slav to support millions of people for forty years, the destruction of the Canaanite kingdoms and the uncountable miracles up to this very day.

The Torah relates:

When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of Laban, his mother's (Rivka) brother and the sheep that belonged to Laban, his mother's brother, Ya'akov approached (the well) and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered the sheep of Lavan his mother's brother.

It was the sudden surge of overpowering love that Ya'akov felt for Rachel that energized him with the power to pull off the rock, as one would pull up a cork from a bottle (Rashi).

Now, what are the telltale signs of true love? I suggest: The desire to be close to the person one loves; the need to communicate – to be understood and understand each other; the desire to give more and more without expecting anything in

return; and to see only the good and forgive that which is less than good.

After listening to many religious leaders and their students from the galut, I can only conclude that although they learn Torah and keep mitzvot, they do not love being Jewish. Many have an acquaintance with Judaism, some even like Judaism, but many do not love being Jewish.

If they loved being Jewish, then in no way could they remain in the galut. To love being Jewish is to strive to be as close to HaShem as humanly possible. And to be close to HaShem means to live in the land of which the Torah states Devarim 11:12):



A land the LORD your God longs for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end.

To love being Jewish means returning to the holy land without calculating its personal or professional expedience, just as a young couple very much in love throws expediency to the wind in order to fulfill their desires.

To love being Jewish means to know and to communicate with the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov in the holy language of HaShem. I would not be wrong in stating that the overwhelming majority of religious leaders in the galut cannot hold a Hebrew conversation on the level of a four year old Israeli child.

To love being Jewish is to remain home and prepare for the beautiful meaningful holiday of Pesach, and not to take flight to a resort in order to escape the ghosts of chametz.

To love being Jewish is to look forward, every week, to Shabbat and regard the kitchen preparations as a personal simcha for the great merit of being part of God's chosen

nation.

To love being Jewish is to be part of a daily minyan that imparts to the congregation a spiritual experience, not to seek out the fastest minyan in town in order to begin work early.

To love being Jewish is to behave in reverence and silence when present in a bet kneset, not to sit and talk; stopping only to partake in the “kiddush club”.

To love being Jewish is to be part of the defense of Eretz Yisrael as soldiers of Tzahal.

To love being Jewish is to notice the faults and shortcomings of the Israeli leadership and join with us in our efforts to redress the mistakes they commit.

To love being Jewish is to learn Torah in the special environment of the land where the Torah was intended by HaShem to be kept.

If your rabbi or rosh yeshiva in the galut does not encourage your aliya to Eretz Yisrael, it has nothing to do with the land or its people – it simply means that your mentor is acquainted with Judaism, or may even like being Jewish, but he does not **love** being Jewish and everything that that love demands.

Love is indeed a “many splendored thing”. It is a call from the depths of one’s soul to announce that it has been touched, and resonates out to the mind and emotions of the individual.

If one does not feel love for Judaism in its wholeness, then that person’s soul has not been touched.

Ya’akov’s soul was touched when he met Rachel, as was Shlomo Ha’Melech when he felt the love of HaShem to Am Yisrael, and the soul of Rabbi Akiva towards the woman who made him what he was.

We who have returned to the Land of Israel in love, are continuing to forge ahead in the authentic Jewish history that was so violently and cruelly disrupted 2000 years ago.

No obstacle will impede our determination to restore the former glory of Am Yisrael as God's chosen people – neither enemies from within, or those from without.

As Shlomo Ha'Melech wrote: *It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away.*

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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