

Vayishlach 5772

BS"D Parashat Vayishlach 5772

Although the weekly Torah readings are approaching the end of the patriarchal and matriarchal period, the founding fathers and mothers of our nation are still very much with us because of the pivotal role they played in the future direction of the Jewish nation and world history.

The Gemara states (Brachot 16b)

Only three (Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov) are considered Avot (founding fathers) and only four (Sara, Rivka, Rachel and Leah) are considered Imahot (founding mothers).

And on the dream of Paro's Chief Butler (Breshiet 40:10):

*and in the vine were **three** branches: and it **budded into blossoms** and the **clusters brought forth ripe grapes***

the Gemara (Chulin 92a) explains:

The vine represents the world, the three branches – Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov, its blossoms shot forth – Sara, Rivka, Rachel and Leah, and the clusters brought forth ripe grapes – the twelve tribes.

What made the Avot and Imahot so unique?

As explained in volume 1b of the series "With All Your Might" (parashat Kedoshim 5768) the strange number of 613 mitzvot (HaShem's commandments to the Jewish nation) are the result of the life's work of the Avot – Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. The *kedusha* (holiness) of these three men was so elevated that, through their actions, they penetrated into the highest

domain of the spiritual world and, by doing so, revealed the *mitzvot* (actions) which unite our world and the *shamayim*. Had the *Avot* been greater, we today would have 614 *mitzvot* or 1000. Had they been less holy, we would have today 612 or less.

Rava, the great Babylonian Amora confirms this (Sota 17:a):

In the merit of Avraham's humility where he refers to himself as ashes and dust, we have the mitzvot of ashes of the red heifer and the dust of the sota; and in the merit of rejecting the offer of a reward for saving the people of Sodom by saying "I will not take from a string to a shoe thong," we have the mitzvot of techelet in tsitsit and the leather straps on the tefilin.

The three *Avot* reached the pinnacle of human kedusha that enabled them to reach the spiritual roots of *mitzvot*.

Now, if the contributions of the *Avot* were essential in constituting the character of the Jewish nation in the elevated spirituality that connects us to the Creator, the contributions of the *Imahot* dominated the very real "hands on, day-to-day" involvement and survival of the Jewish nation in the jungle we call *olam hazeh* (this world).

Our mother Sara perceived the unbridgeable, contrasting souls of the holy, God-fearing Yitzchak as opposed to the *pereh adam* (wild, untameable) Yishmael. Yishmael's corrupt, depraved, heinous, immoral, impious and profane basic nature would bring untold human suffering through his pagan beliefs, and eventually through Islam, and his essence is the absolute antithesis of the basic nature of the future Jewish nation.

Our mother Sara, with Godly agreement, "molded in concrete" the future conflict between Yitzchak and Yishmael by urging Avraham to send Hagar and Yishmael away. Sara's words, "The

son of this maid servant will not be heir with my son Yitzchak" would be the guiding factors as to who would be the sole heir to Avraham's spiritual bond with HaShem, indicated by HaShem's gift of Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish nation.

The second of our great matriarchs was Rivka, to whom I will return shortly.

The third and fourth of our matriarchs are Rachel and Leah, who unknown to their husband Ya'akov, agreed to exchange places on the wedding night. This single act had a prodigious influence on all of Jewish history, because it laid the groundwork for the centuries-long contention and rivalry between the House of David within the tribes born to Leah, and the House of Yosef born to Rachel.

The House of Yosef claimed that the monarchy was their legitimate heritage, since their mother Rachel was intended to be the wife of Ya'akov, first in number and in emotions. The House of David claimed that the monarchy was given to Yehuda, son of Leah, and through him to David.

Ultimately, the rivalry brought about the secession of the ten northern tribes under Yeravam ben Navat, with the city of Shechem (the burial place of Yosef) as the breakaway capital, and the exile of the ten tribes under King Hoshea ben Elah by the Assyrians.

But this is not the end of the story of the ten lost tribes, because they will very soon return to the Jewish nation in the most miraculous way, very soon.

Let's return now to Rivka, wife of Yitzchak and mother of Ya'akov and Aisav.

Our parasha states (Bereshiet 35:8)

And Devorah Rebekah's nurse, died, and was buried below (in

the vicinity of) Beth-El under the oak; and the name of it was Allon-Bacuth.

Rashi comments that when Ya'akov left home to go to the house of Lavan, Rivka promised to send for him when Aisav's anger would wane. After 20 years, Rivka sent Devorah to inform Ya'akov that he could now return home. So it appears that Rivka perceived that the profound hatred that Aisav harbored in his heart towards Ya'akov had dissipated to a degree that Ya'akov would no longer have to fear for his life.

However, this was not true. When Aisav learned that Ya'akov was returning home, he went out to meet Ya'akov with a military force of 400 men, intent on killing Ya'akov and closing the book on the future Jewish nation.

Under these circumstances, why did Rivka send for Ya'akov to return home?

I submit:

After 20 years of hateful planning by Aisav, Rivka realized that Aisav's animosity towards Ya'akov would never dissipate. She sent her lifelong, loyal companion Devorah to inform Ya'akov that his brother's hatred would be carried on from father to son and from nation to nation until the end of history. So, the time had come for Ya'akov to return to Eretz Yisrael and to stand up to Aisav in defense of God's values of good against evil, without fear or trepidation – knowing that HaShem would be at Ya'akov's side.

In our parasha, the two brothers meet. The Torah relates that Aisav runs towards Ya'akov with the intent to kill him, but instead of the "kiss of death," Aisav kisses his brother in a dramatic turn of events.

What happened?

As Aisav was advancing towards the Jewish family, an

exceptionally unexpected scene unfolded before his eyes. Ya'akov with his four wives, sons and daughters had fallen to the ground in an act of total submission.

Aisav felt that the thrill of the anticipated degrading, debasing, demeaning, disgracing, dishonoring and dehumanizing of his brother was far more pleasurable, entertaining, gratifying and satisfying than the one moment of relief he would experience by killing him.

Aisav said to himself, "Let Ya'akov and the Jews live on. After the Crusades, the pogroms, the auto de fes and the exiles, my children's children will emaciate Ya'akov's children in ghettos, then herd them into cattle cars on the way to the gas chambers and crematoria of Treblinka and Auschwitz. Indeed, let Ya'akov live on."

In actuality, Ya'akov was returning home to compete with Aisav, as he was told by Rivka. But when Ya'akov saw Aisav's 400 bloodthirsty men as opposed to the few of his family, he realized that the time had not yet arrived for him to defeat Aisav. It was the will of HaShem to permit evil a free hand in history, with the eventual outcome that evil would devour itself, as has proven to be the case in human history. But in the interim Ya'akov and the Jewish nation will have to be satisfied with survival within the evil that surrounds them.

Until when?

The answer is in this week's *haftara* from the prophecy of Ovadia:

For the day of God is near upon all the nations: as they did to you, it shall be done to them..

But in mount Zion there shall be refuge for you, and it shall be holy; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.

And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Aisav for stubble, and they shall burn among them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining to the house of Aisav; for God has spoken.

And they of the South shall possess the mount of Aisav, and they of the lowland the Philistines; and they shall possess the field of Ephraim, and the field of Samaria; and Benjamin shall possess Gilead.

And the captives of this host of the children of Israel, that are among the Canaanites, shall possess even unto Zarephath; and the captives of Jerusalem, that are in Sepharad shall possess the cities of the South.

And liberators shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Aisav; and the kingdom shall be of HaShem.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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