

Vayishlach 5774

BS"D Parashat Vayishlach

Part One: The Rav and the Rebbe

HaShem appeared to the prophet Zecharia (7:1) with the magnificent message

This is what the LORD says: "I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain."

This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age."

The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there..."

This is what the LORD Almighty says: "I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west."

I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be faithful and righteous to them as their God."

We shall return to this later.

The human condition and, certainly, that of am Yisrael presents us with a myriad of unanswered questions. There are rabbanim who attempt to escape the difficult issues in our lives, but the difficulties catch up with them and at some point impel them to face reality. I wish to bring up one of these issues – the place of Medinat Yisrael in our lives and its role in Jewish history.

Many rabbis have left the galut to make their homes in Eretz

Yisrael, and many who could not, for any number of reasons, have visited here many times, such as Harav Aharon Kotler, Harav Moshe Feinstein, Harav Ya'akov Kaminetzky, my rosh yeshiva Harav Avraham Jofen and even the Satmar Rebbe, all of them zichronam livracha..

But there are exceptions who have never even visited the Medina.

I was not a talmid of the Rav (Harav Yosef Dov Soloveichik z"tl) at Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan (I chose a yeshiva whose atmosphere was closer to what prevailed in the pre-Shoah yeshivot of eastern Europe – the Nevardike yeshiva); nor was I a chassid of the Rebbe (Harav Menachem Mendel Shenierson z"tl, the Lubavicher Rebbe, my family are Tsanzer chassidim), but it appears that I revere the Rav and the Rebbe more than many of their most loyal adherents.

For an extensive period of time, I have attempted to discover why these two Torah giants never stepped foot in Medinat Yisrael (the Rav was here once in the pre-Medina 1930s). The reasons I received have no credence and allot little credit to those who believe them.

The generally accepted reason for the Rav's not visiting the Medina was his desire to prevent a controversy with his cousins in the Brisker yeshiva, and the reason given by the Chabad adherents is that once in Eretz Yisrael the halacha would prohibit the Rebbe from leaving.

I reject the reason affiliated with the Rav, because a Torah giant of his dimensions when confronted with the choice of performing an enormous mitzva – like being in Eretz Yisrael and incurring the wrath of cousins or to refrain from the mitzva, would certainly perform the mitzva and deal later with the family fallout.

With regard to the restriction on leaving the country. I am quite sure that even if the Rebbe's chassidim are unaware of

the halacha, the Rebbe certainly knew that the restriction applies only to residence of the Holy Land not to visitors or students (Gitin 76,b and Rashi's commentary).

Thus we return to the original question: Why did these great Torah leaders not even visit Medinat Yisrael; and why did they keep their reasons so secretive? The quandary is compounded in light of the classical work "*Kol dodie dofek*" which the Rav authored, in which he enumerates the wondrous establishment of the Medina, and the fact that any self-respecting Israeli public figure when visiting the States sought out the council of the Rebbe.

Before continuing, I feel the necessity to ask their forgiveness if what I suggest is incorrect. HaShem, who knows the thoughts of Man, will corroborate that I sought only to do them honor and to learn the lessons of their lives for the betterment of our own.

I submit that the Rav and Rebbe were of the same mindset of Ya'akov in this week's parasha.

Ya'akov fearing the deadly aims of his brother Eisav, divides the family into two camps with a distance of one day's journey between them. He was motivated by the necessity to guarantee the future of Am Yisrael, as the pasuk says (Beraishiet 32:8-9)

And Ya'akov was very fearful and pained. And he divided the people who were with him and the sheep and cattle and camels into two camps. And he said, "If Eisav shall come to one camp and smite them, then the other camp will escape.

I submit that the Rav and the Rebbe were so effected by the Shoah that they felt the dire necessity for two centers of Judaism in the world – Eretz Yisrael and the modern Bavel, the United States.

They believed that by staying away from the Medina the message would eventually filter down that one can be a “good Jew” even in Boston and Eastern Parkway, and the two centers will thrive each in its own way without having to say so explicitly.

In the absence of a Sanhedrin to decide which point of view is correct – that of the Rav and the Rebbe or that of the gedolim who have encouraged aliya, the final “posek” (resolver) will be the realities of life which will determine the correct way of the Torah in our time.

At this juncture in our history, the undeniable reality of our life is that the galut is dying. With every passing day the cancer of assimilation spreads to destroy another organ of the Jewish nation. Not only assimilation in the sense of intermarriage, but assimilation of values and morality within our own camp. The values, desire for material gains, speech, dress interests, business conduct and much more, draw the religious Jew closer to those of his gentile neighbors.

The final decision regarding which outlook is the correct one is indeed up to the realities of life, but perhaps we can borrow another directive from Ya’akov in our parasha.

Ya’akov, at some point before meeting his brother, regrets his decision to divide the family and brings them together (chapter 33), in the realization that there is more strength and security in unity than in division. And the united family stands firm to repel the threats of Eisav.

Let us return to the above quoted prophecy of Zecharia, which has been realized in our time, where in the streets of Yerushalayim *“men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there...”*

I often think to myself what would be, had these great rabbis of the galut called out to the Jewish people to return en-mass

to Eretz Yisrael.

Not only the streets of Yerushalayim would be home to great numbers of Jews, but also the streets of Shechem, Bet Lechem, Yericho, Chevron, Gush Katif and Gaza city.

May HaShem guide our leaders with the wisdom and courage to show us the way to the Promised Land.

Part Two: Jewish Courage

Though Ya'akov Aveinu returns home triumphantly, as Chazal say – spiritually, physically and materially “whole” – a dark cloud hovers over him as he learns that waiting to greet him in *Eretz Yisrael* is his brother, Eisav, accompanied by 400 “armed to the teeth” cohorts.

Ya'akov prepares for the fateful meeting of not only two alienated brothers, but of the collision of two ways of life; both which will influence humanity until the end of time.

We find Ya'akov gripped with fear. He devises a three-pronged strategy: to bribe Eisav with gifts, to pray to God, and just to make sure, if these two tactics should fail, Ya'akov divides his loved ones and material wealth into two camps, in the event Eisav destroys one camp, the other will have an opportunity to escape.

Ya'akov is desperate. On this day, his destiny, and that of the Jewish nation, hang in the balance, and tomorrow it will be resolved in the life and death struggle between him and his brother.

In view of Ya'akov's pessimistic mood, we cannot escape the seemingly unexplainable change of heart on the part of Ya'akov. At the height of the drama, when Ya'akov is about to meet his brother, he unites the two camps into one. The Torah even relates by name the order in which the family stood at the approach of Eisav: Bilha and Zilpa with their children

first, Leah and her children second and Yosef and Rachel last.

How did the fear dissipate?

The answer is in the strange episode that separates the opening pesukim describing Ya'akov's preparations and the meeting with Eisav – the all-night wrestling match between Ya'akov and the angel.

The mystery lies not only with a man physically fighting an angel and winning, but the very pesukim are contradictory. In chapter 32:25, the Torah says: "And Ya'akov remained alone and a man began wrestling with him until daylight". Now, if Ya'akov was "alone", how did he wrestle with a man?

I suggest that Ya'akov was indeed alone; the only man who was present was Ya'akov himself. It was he who was wrestling and struggling with a desperate spiritual dilemma: "God promised that He would bring me home safely, so why am I terrified at the very thought of meeting my brother? What can Eisav do to me or to my family, in light of God's promise? But the fact is, my heart is filled with terror. Does this mean that I do not believe in God's promise? Who am I? Am I a believing Jew who does not relate to the "reality" of life, but to the reality that God is the master of all things; or am I so superficial that I am unable to overcome the tests that God puts in my path?"

All night Ya'akov struggles with his spirituality, of which Eisav is also a part, for they are twins not only in body, but also in soul. Ya'akov agonizes with the greatest struggle that has ever crossed his path: "Is there still a part of Eisav within me, or did I succeed in exorcising it?" Ya'akov engages in this struggle during the night of his life, when the truth is imperceptible. At the first rays of morning light, the light of clarity, Ya'akov resolves his perplexing spiritual dilemma, declaring, "I am a totally believing Jew. No more compromises. No gifts for Eisav. No more division into two

camps, but reliance on the promise that God has chosen me and my descendants for all time" (we will deal with why Ya'akov ended the night with a crippled right foot another time, be"h).

Ya'akov returns to his family and merges the two camps into one, fully confident in his inner strength, which he now projects to the family, and all are prepared to face the antagonist of all that is holy to Am Yisrael.

Standing tall, confident in God's promise, they now see Eisav running towards Ya'akov. But at the dramatic crescendo of that moment Ya'akov falls to the ground, prostrating himself not just once, but as the pasuk (33:3) relates, seven times with his face in the mud. The promise inherent in the name "Yisrael" – you have fought with an angel and with men, and have won" – retreats back to Ya'akov, the brother who hangs on to the heel of Eisav, the heel which is destined to trample Ya'akov and his children, until such time when the Ya'akovs of the world will say, "enough – we totally believe in God's promise, despite the realities before our eyes".

We, the descendants of Ya'akov, have lived through the dark night of our Galut, when our status as God's chosen people has been put to the test so many times. At the new morning of our history, God has returned us to *Eretz Yisrael*, from where we can be healed of the wounds inflicted upon us by the Eisavs of the generations. We have built one of the strongest and smartest armies in the world. We are 6 million people who live, grow and develop in the midst of hundreds of millions of sworn suicidal enemies who are unable to uproot us. This is "hat'chal'ta de'ge'ula", when miracles happen on a daily basis. Still, our leaders, like Ya'akov, prostrate themselves, in fear, before Goyim.

Ya'akov was blessed with the name Yisrael. The "Ya'akovs of the world will always find rationalizations for bowing down, for compromise, for retreating. The true "Bnei Yisrael" (of

whom there are unfortunately not many) do not include these words in their lexicon; it is they who know what must be done at this time.

A true Torah leader of Medinat Yisrael would begin with a declaration that we are God's "Chosen People", who have been returned by God to the Holy Land; whoever disagrees is in violation of the Bible. That same day, the area of *Eretz Yisrael* that was liberated in the Six Day War, would be declared as part of Medinat Yisrael. All non-Jews would have to sign a statement recognizing the Jews as sole sovereign over the land, and failure to do so would lead to immediate expulsion.

This is just the beginning of what would be done if we had a leadership with Yirrat Shamayim .

But, alas, Jewish leadership the world over prefers the status of Ya'akov; for to be Yisrael requires sacrifice, fortitude, and great emunah.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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