

Vayishlach 5781

BS"D Parashat Vayishlach 5781

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

The Parsha and Current Events: Surviving Evil

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

The Gemara states (Tractate Berachot 16,b):

.אברהם אבינו אבינו אברהם אבינו ,אברהם אבינו אברהם אבינו

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 (Bereishiet 40:10):

אברהם אברהם אברהם אברהם אברהם אברהם אברהם אברהם אברהם אברהם

and in the vine were three branches: and it budded into

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 tzitzit and the leather straps on the tefillin.

The three Avot achieved the pinnacle of human kedusha that enabled them to contact the spiritual roots of mitzvot.

Now, if 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 Sarah perceived the unbridgeable, contrasting souls of the holy, God-fearing Yitzchak as opposed to the pereh adam (wild, untamable) 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, which are all the absolute antithesis of the basic nature of the future Jewish nation.

Our mother Sarah, with HaShem's approval, "molded in concrete" the future conflict between Yitzchak and Yishmael by urging Avraham to send Hagar and Yishmael away. Sarah's words, "The son of this maidservant will not be heir with my son Yitzchak" would be the guiding factors in who would be the sole heirs to Avraham's spiritual bond with HaShem, as would be indicated by HaShem's gift of Eretz Yisrael to the descendants of the three

(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 Esav's anger would wane. After 20 years, Rivka sends Devorah to inform Ya'akov that he could now return home. When Esav learned that Ya'akov was returning home, he went out to meet Ya'akov with a military force of 400 men, all intent to kill Ya'akov and close the book on the future Jewish nation. Under these circumstances, why did Rivka send for Ya'akov to return?

I submit:

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

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

What happened?

As Esav was advancing towards the Jewish family, an exceptional 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.

Esav felt that the thrill of the ongoing degrading, debasing,

demeaning, disgracing, dishonoring, and dehumanizing of his brother was far more pleasurable, entertaining, gratifying, and satisfying than the one instant surge of euphoria of murdering him would be.

Esav says to himself, "Let Ya'akov and the Jews live on. After the Crusades, the pogroms, the auto-da-fé, 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".

Ya'akov, for his part, returned home to compete with Esav, as he was told by Rivka. But Ya'akov when seeing Esav's 400 bloodthirsty men as opposed to the few of his family, realized that the time had not yet arrived for him to defeat Esav. 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 would have to be satisfied with mere survival within the evil that surrounds them.

Until when????

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

וְיָשָׁבוּ בְּעִיר יְהוּדָה

:וְיָשָׁבוּ בְּעִיר יְהוּדָה וְיָשָׁבוּ בְּעִיר יְהוּדָה וְיָשָׁבוּ בְּעִיר יְהוּדָה וְיָשָׁבוּ בְּעִיר יְהוּדָה וְיָשָׁבוּ בְּעִיר יְהוּדָה

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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 Esau for stubble, and they shall burn among them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining to the house of Esau; for God has spoken.

And they of the South shall possess the mount of Esau, 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 liberators shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be of HaShem.

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Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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