

Tal Chermon

Explorations into Parashat Ha-Shavua

BERESHIT

Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner

Translated and notes by
Rabbi David Goldenberg

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Introduction

When Ha-Rav Shlomo Aviner served as the Rabbi of Moshav Keshet in the Golan, in the shadow of Mt. Chermon, he delivered a weekly class on Parashat Ha-Shavua focusing on its connection to our national and personal soul.

The name of the book "Tal Chermon" literally "The Dew of Chermon" is based upon the verse "Like the dew of Chermon which descends upon the mountains of Zion" (Tehillim 133:3). We pray that these beautifully-crafted discussions on the Parashah help the waters of Torah descend upon the Land of Zion and the entire Jewish People as we together experience the revival of our Nation in our Land, and individually experience personal growth.

We are grateful to Rabbi David Goldenberg for his translation and for his initiative in bringing this volume to fruition.

Mordechai Tzion

In the heart of Jerusalem between the Walls

BERESHIT

1. Gradual Creation
2. The World of Creation and the World of Action
3. Human Action
4. The Process of Man's Elevation
5. Man's Elevation and the Descent of the Divine Illumination to Permeate the World
6. Man's Ascent but the Decline of the Generations

1. Gradual Creation

This section deals with the Creation of the World. The world was not suddenly made in a single moment, but rather developed in stages. The transition from naught to existence is not achieved in an instant as our Sages have put it, "the world was created by ten (Divine) utterances." But surely "with one utterance it could have been created" – so why were more used? Hashem's capability is obviously infinite and there is no obstacle to instantaneous creation. Gradual creation is for human considerations, "in order to give goodly reward to the righteous."¹ A world which was created

¹ Pirkei Avot 5:1.

with **ten** Divine utterances is a world that enables us to participate in the **continuing** process of creation. Such participation endows life with meaning. The definition of a righteous person is one whose life has significance, and the meaningful acts that he performs are called mitzvot (*lehavdil*,² existentialist philosophy also seeks meaning to life. When confronted with an existence devoid of meaning it despairs and desperately searches for significance to life).

2. The World of Creation and the World of Action

The world was created through a gradual process that did not cease at the end of the seven days of Creation. Indeed, G-d suspended His actions of Creation, but the creative process continued via man. Thus, in a well-known midrash, man's actions are considered as an extension of Hashem's creation. The wicked Turnus Rufus once asked Rabbi Akiva: "Whose deeds are more beneficial - man's or G-d's?" Rabbi Akiva answered: "What are more advantageous, unprocessed ears of grain or ready-made cakes?"³ So just as man complements Hashem's creation in the act of circumcision, so too all of creation is enhanced by human deeds. This is the interpretations of the verse, "that G-d had created, **to**

2 Not to be compared with the aforementioned. A term used to differentiate between the holy and the mundane.

3 Midrash Tanchuma, Parashat Tazria, section 5.

do."⁴ The unstated subject of the verb "**to do**" is man and it means that G-d has created, but man is "to do," i.e. to continue the creation started by Hashem.⁵

There is a dispute between the schools of Hillel and Shammai as to whether **heaven** or **earth** was created first. The School of Shammai holds that the heavens preceded basing their view on the order of the words in the verse, "In the beginning G-d created **heaven** and **earth**."⁶ But the School of Hillel, relying on the order of the words in another verse, "on the day that G-d made **earth** and **heaven**,"⁷ holds that earth was created first. How can these apparently contradictory verses be resolved? The dispute stems from their different perspectives. The School of Shammai views the spiritual and divine aspect within matters, while the School of Hillel focuses on the physical realization of these things in this world. Thus in reality there is no contradiction. Each verse refers to a different world. In the world of "*Beriyah*" (creating) the heaven came first while in the world of "*Asiyah*" (doing) the earth came first. The world of "*Beriyah*" is the lofty, abstract, spiritual world.⁸ The term "*Beriyah*" is only used

4 Bereshit 2:3.

5 Bereshit Rabbah 11:5 and 42:3 and it explicitly states that the creation is incomplete until man performs **his** part. Explicit use of this verse as the source for this idea appears in the Zohar, part 1, p. 47b. (translator)

6 Bereshit 1:1.

7 Bereshit 2:4.

8 In a simplified explanation we could describe "*Beriyah*" as the world of 'thought' in which the **aim** is always contemplated first. This aim is to "rejoice in G-d" which is done in heaven (Mesilat Yescharim, chapter 1). Only later does one plan

regarding Hashem's actions,⁹ while "*Asiyah*" can also refer to man's deeds. There are different levels in the world, some of which are mentioned in the verse, "Everyone who bears My Name whom I created (= "*Beriyah*") for My glory whom I fashioned (= "*Yetzirah*") and made (= "*Asiyah*")."¹⁰ In the "*Kiddush Levana*"¹¹ prayer, we say "Blessed be your Fashioner ("*Yetzirah*")", blessed is your Maker ("*Asiyah*")", blessed is your Owner ("*Koneh*")"; blessed is your Creator ("*Beniyah*").¹² Here, "Owner" is added, and this is what *Pirkei Avot* calls "*Keriah*."¹³ Thus, in the heavenly, abstract world of "*Beriyah*" the heavens preceded, while in our practical world of "*Asiyah*" the earth came first.

3. Human Action

As mentioned, everything that was created by Hashem needs to "**be done**,"¹⁴ i.e. to be completed. By our actions

out the details of how to achieve it, i.e. via the world of "*Asiyah*," action, on earth. However, in the world of "*Asiyah*," one builds from the bottom (earth) upwards (heaven). Briefly, in the world of thought the heavens come first whilst in the world of action the earth comes first. (translator)

9 As in *Bereshit* 1:1, "And G-d created the heavens and the earth" and in *Bamidbar* 16:30 concerning the swallowing up of Korach, "But if G-d created something entirely new."

10 *Yeshayahu* 43:7

11 The sanctification of the new moon prayer recited on Saturday night early in the month.

12 The Hebrew initials of these four words make the word "Yaakov."

13 End of chapter 6.

14 See above footnote #9.

of completion, we also endow all former acts with their true significance. We can construe our deeds as if they are the extension of the tenth utterance, "Let us make man."¹⁵ We are finishing off the **making** of man by the further development and improvement of mankind. Furthermore, by our actions of completion we endow all the previous nine utterances with their true significance. The Torah relates that initially there was unformed chaos which Hashem gradually arranged. Incorrectly, we might have assumed that this process of arrangement was completed at the end of the seven days of Creation. Our Sages, however, informs us that there were two thousand years of chaos, which Hashem had only begun arranging, while we had to continue the process. Following the two thousand years of chaos came two thousand years of human elevation by the Divine instruction of the Torah. These are followed by two thousand years during which the Messiah will come. Armed with the Torah, we tackle the task of rectifying the chaos in the world and slowly but surely advance the world from *Olam Ha-Tohu* (The World of Chaos) to *Olam Ha-Tikun* (The World of Rectification).

4. The Process of Man's Elevation

The task of making order out of the chaos progressed very slowly. Man was not the epitome of ethical living. *Adam*

¹⁵ Bereshit 1:26.

*Harishon*¹⁶ was an all – encompassing, universal and cosmological being that embraced the souls of all humanity. *Adam Harishon* is a special being. On the one hand, he is a man just like us; while on the other hand, he is a cosmological being whose soul includes the souls of all mankind. Subsequently these souls split up into individual personalities. Hence what befalls the universal *Adam Harishon* actually occurs to the whole of humanity. So in fact the whole of mankind has some association with sin. Kayin,¹⁷ Lemech,¹⁸ the generation of the deluge,¹⁹ the generation of the dispersion²⁰ and the sons of G-d²¹ all sinned. Every conceivable sin between man and man and between man and G-d was committed.

Technologically man was also backward. We are told that Tuval-Kayin was a maker of all copper and iron implements.²² Man was a very feeble being and progressed, both technologically and spiritually, with many setbacks, very slowly. In fact in the ten generations between *Adam Harishon* and Noach, mankind²³ degenerated so badly that it was condemned to destruction by drowning. Finally

16 Adam. Literally, first man.

17 Bereshit 4:8.

18 Bereshit 4:23.

19 Bereshit 6:12.

20 Bereshit 11:1-9.

21 Bereshit 6:2.

22 Bereshit 4:22.

23 Pirkei Avot 5:2.

Noach appeared on the scene and had a tempering effect as Hashem smelled the appeasing fragrance²⁴ of his offering.

In the generation of Enosh, man groped out towards the Master of the Universe but instead ended up worshipping idols. Every now and then important personalities such as Chanoch, Metushelach and others surfaced. Then, "ten generations after Noach, Avraham appeared, and received the reward of all of them."²⁵ This means that the whole complicated course of history was tailored so that this gigantic personality should emerge. But that was not the end of the evolutionary process. Avraham's son, Yishmael; and Yitzchak's son, Esav, were not incorporated into the Nation of Israel; unlike all of the twelve, righteous sons of Yaakov who **were** included. But it was not a smooth progress here either. Little by little, man must progress from a spiritually primitive and coarse being, enmeshed in sin, to eventually becoming an elevated and refined creation.

5. Man's Elevation and the Descent of the Divine Illumination to Permeate the World

Man's development is also a Divine process. "Ten and not nine"²⁶- **all** the ten staged of Creation including the last one of "Let us create man" are all divinely and not humanly con-

²⁴ Bereshit 8:21.

²⁵ Pirkei Avot 5:3.

²⁶ A term taken from Sefer Ha-Yetzirah (an ancient book of Jewish mysticism).

trolled. Man grows, develops and advances because the Divine illumination descends and pervades the whole of existence.

Evolution and development are well known concepts in modern thought, and have been deeply examined both in biology²⁷ and philosophy²⁸ by non-Jewish thinkers. At first sight there seems to be a contradiction between the process of *atzilut* and *hishtalshlut*²⁹ on the one hand, and the process of evolution and development on the other hand. The former are from "above downwards" while the latter are from "below upwards." They are not, however, contradictory and the two notions are the very same process. The **descent** of the Divine illumination into the world and the **ascent** of man are identical. *Adam Harishon's* sin (descent) caused the departure (ascent) of the *Shechinah*.³⁰ The Midrash³¹ describes the reverse process how Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, etc... and finally Moshe³² by virtue of their ascent in righteousness brought the Divine Presence back down into the world. Hashem's Divine illumination pervades the whole of reality and thus invigorates and vivifies the entire

27 Darwin developed the Theory of Evolution.

28 E.g. Spencer.

29 The Kabbalistic concept of the descent of the Divine illumination from the upper worlds to influence and permeate the lower worlds (= emanation and devolution). (translator)

30 The Divine Presence which is the Divine illumination in the world.

31 Pesikta De-Rav Kahana 1

32 When receiving the Torah.

world. The greater the degree of Divine illumination in a body, the higher the level of life is in that body; ranging from inanimate objects through to vegetation, animals and upwards. The Divine illumination descends to pervade the world more and more over the years and generations and thus man correspondingly ascends more and more.

6. Man's Ascent but the Decline of the Generations

The "decline of the generations" occurs at the level of the individual. All of the individuals of earlier generations were closer to the Divine Revelation, manifested at the "Giving of the Torah"³³ at Mt. Sinai. However, at the national level, the level of the generation as a whole, there is a continual ascent.³⁴ This does not mean that everyone in our generation is superior to those of former generations. A distinction must be made between individual greatness and superiority of a class as a whole. It is quite feasible that an individual may be personally inferior to someone of a former generation but at the same time class-wise he outranks his counterpart of the past generation. This may be illustrated by a comparison made between a broken down car and a bicycle that functions. At the "personal" level the bicycle is better

33 In the year 2,448 after the Creation of the world (approximately three and a half thousand years ago). (translator)

34 See the article "Hador - The Generation" by Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Cohain Kook in his book "Eder Hayakar."

because it works. "Category-wise," however, the broken down car surpasses the bike because it can be repaired to become a functioning car which cannot be done with the bicycle.

Every generation exceeds the previous one because holiness is cumulative.³⁵ A question may be posed: is each new generation greater than the previous one in the same sense that the midget on the shoulders of the giant is greater and higher up than the giant? That is, the generation is more degenerate but rides on the shoulders of all the cumulative good of former times or is the generation itself, in its very essence, superior to previous generations? The simple answer is that all the generations are inseparable. They are the same body at different stages of development. It is like the question: is a fourteen year old child bigger than he was when he was thirteen because he has had an extra piece added to him, or is he through and through bigger than the thirteen year old? The question is meaningless, because it is the very same child that has simply grown up.³⁶ Mankind is continually progressing. The Divine illumination that oper-

35 All the goodness, holiness, Torah study, kindness, etc... performed in a generation are added to the total goodness of all former generations. Goodness is cumulative. Evil and wickedness are not. They remain separate and cannot combine to the evil of former generations. Hence the world as a whole and each new generation has inevitably progressed beyond past generations. (translator)

36 That is, there are not two separate entities to be compared, they are the same body at different stages of development and so it is with the generations. Every new generation is the past one that has simply "grown up" (translator).

ates in the world propels all the generations onwards and upwards. While it is true that the more advanced matters become the more opportunities there are for complications to arise, the inner process of advancement and elevation nonetheless continues relentlessly.

Haftarah for Parashat Bereshit

Spiritual Blindness

[Ashkenazim: Yeshayahu 42:5-43:10

Sefardim: Yeshayahu 42:5-42:21

Yemenite Jews: Yeshayahu 42:1-42:16]

In our Haftarah, Yeshayahu is full of anger.

"Listen, deaf ones; look, blind ones, so that you can see" (18).

There is so much to see, so many miracles which Hashem performs for His Nation. One must open one's eyes and see the natural fulfillment of the messianic prophesies that have led to the establishment of the State of Israel. We are not discussing pseudo-prophecy or retroactive prophecy, as those who ascribe to Biblical criticism explain, but the promises of Yeshayahu materializing before our very eyes. "The earlier ones have come about" – the earlier prophesies were already fulfilled – "And I relate new ones, I will let you hear them before they spring forth" (9).

To our distress, there are avowed blind people - people who recognize these prophesies but refuse to register in their

minds this shining reality. Who are these blind people? "Who is blind but My servant and who is deaf as My messenger whom I sent? Who is blind as the perfect one and blind as Hashem's servant" (19).

To be "Hashem's servant" or "Hashem's messenger" is one of the highest levels of involvement, requiring a special ability to integrate sterling character traits, righteousness, purity, and holiness. This obviously includes observing, out of unlimited love, Shabbat, kashrut, and all of the other mitzvoth. A person such as this is willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of Torah and we are full of respect and admiration for him.

To our dismay, however, despite his extremely high level of commitment, this religiously and spiritually righteous person is capable of being afflicted with historical blindness. He is capable of passing through powerful revolutions which occur to the Nation of Israel without noticing: "Seeing much but not observing, opening the ears but not hearing" (20).

The day will arrive, though, when "Hashem desires for the sake of its righteousness that the Torah will be magnified and made glorious" (21), for the sake of the Nation of Israel. The same Nation, which was free from guilt during the thousands of years of Exile, yet suffered terrible afflictions, pogroms, expulsions, and finally the horrors of the Holocaust – is now free. "But it is a looted, downtrodden Nation, all of whose people are trapped in holes and hidden away

in prisons. They are robbed with no one to rescue them, oppressed with no one to say: 'Make restitution' (22)

Now everything has changed completely. Certain people – whether religious or not – worry in vain about the future of our State. "But now, so says Hashem, your Creator, O Yaakov; the One who formed you, O Yisrael: 'Do not fear for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, you are Mine" (43:1). Tzahal – the Israel Defense Force – will stand strong. "When you pass through water, I will be with you; and through rivers, they will not flood you; when you walk through fire, you will not be burned and a flame will not burn within you" (2).

"Do not fear, for I am with you" (5). Don't we have enough proofs in order to be completely convinced that Hashem has decided to redeem us?

"I will bring your seed from the east" – these are Sefardic Jews, "and gather you from the west" – these are Ashkenazic Jews, "I will say to the north: 'Give back'" – these are Russian Jews, "and to the south: 'Do not withhold'" – these are Yemenite Jews. "Bring My sons from far and my daughters from the ends of the earth" (5-6) – these are Ethiopian Jews and the other lost Tribes of Israel who will be found anew.

What horrible distress is suffered by stubborn Jews who do not see this wondrous chain of miracles. "Bring forth the blind people who have eyes and the deaf who have ears" (8). But do not despair. "Then the eyes of the blind will be

opened and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped" (35:5). "You are My witnesses, says Hashem" (43:10). For this purpose, every one of us is called upon today to be an active witness of our Nation's history.

NOACH

1. Noach
2. Advances Through Crises
3. Hashem's Covenant with Man
4. Morality and the Existence of the World
5. Human Races

1. Noach

Noach was an easygoing and even-tempered person. Any person who becomes angry loses his senses and his soul which is replaced with an idolatrous evil spirit.³⁷ On the other hand, Hashem dwells in the heart of the tranquil³⁸ and therefore "Noach found favor in G-d's eyes."³⁹ As a result of Hashem's pleasure in man, a further stage of human development transpired. Out of the **individuals, nations** now developed.

³⁷ See Shabbat 105b and Zohar, Parashat Tetzaveh, p. 182 (translator).

³⁸ Sefer Charedim in the name of Midrash Neelam.

³⁹ Bereshit 6:8.

2. Advances Through Crises

The topic of this section is the splitting of mankind into different nations and tongues. This is a very significant stage of human development. A **nation** is a new reality in the world. A certain philosopher classified the whole of creation into inanimate objects, vegetation, animals, human beings and **nations**. Ostensibly, this advancement was not planned but occurred by mistake, as a result of the sin of the "Generation of the Dispersion" (resulting from the Tower of Bavel).⁴⁰ However, matters which from our view point occur by default are the ideal and fore-planned from Hashem's perspective. We have been taught that progress is achieved via the failures that precede it, as our Sages have even said about the study of Torah: "A man does not achieve a complete understanding of the words of Torah unless he has first made errors in interpreting them."⁴¹ There are many phenomena that only evolve and are only comprehensible because of the blunders and frustrations that preceded them. So it is in this section. The result of the sin of the "Generation of the Dispersion" was that mankind was divided up into **nations**. The result of Noach's drunkenness was the classification of the spiritual nature of the different nations; and the result of the sin of the "Generation of the Deluge" was the Divine covenant that the entire world's population would never be destroyed again.

⁴⁰ Bereshit 11:1-9.

⁴¹ Talmud, Gittin 43a.

3. Hashem's Covenant with Man

The Divine covenant is not like a human contract. It is not a conditional agreement made between two parties based on mutual interests and for their common good. G-d's covenant is a law of nature. It is neither cancelled nor changes according to circumstances. It is a Divine creation that is even more lasting and permanent than the laws of nature. After the downfall of the "Generation of the Deluge," Hashem made a promise that never again would all mankind perish. This promise also included man's spiritual survival. Man would never lose the Divine image that he possesses. Some people despair of mankind. On seeing man's vulgar materialism, his sins and misdeeds, they think that the whole of the human species will degenerate back into barbarism. They are mistaken. The Divine covenant is an unbreakable promise that mankind, despite all its faults and failings, will remain **human** and will eventually reach its lofty objective. We are fully aware of man's defects and flaws and definitely do not claim that he has already reached perfection. Only the intoxicated see the world as utopia. Our Sages interpreted the verse,⁴² "When he puts his eye to the cup (= concentrates on drinking) he walks on a plain," to mean that the whole world appears to the drunkard as if it is completely flat⁴³ (A certain thinker, in a book titled Theodicee, built a philosophy in which he claimed that there

⁴² Mishlei 23:31.

⁴³ Talmud, Yoma 74b.

is no evil in the world. In contrast, another philosopher wrote a story in which the main character saw everything as perfect. This story highlighted the absurdity of such an approach.⁴⁴ The outlook that there is no bad in the world is in truth very profound, if taken superficially however it becomes simplistically ludicrous. Similarly, but poles apart, our Prophets and great Rabbis used a similar literary ruse in their controversy against opposing views. By simplifying the opinions of their opponents to absurdity, they were able to expose the underlying falsehood in these views). While it is true that there are shortcomings and failures in the world, in the final analysis, these very setbacks bring man's elevation. "The flood came and blotted out almost all of existence, however, the root of humanity that remained was spiritually strengthened. The world became firmly based and a covenant promising its perpetual existence was sealed."⁴⁵

4. Morality and the Existence of the World

Sin is not only a moral deviation but ravages nature itself. There are sins against ones bodily well-being to which the body responds with a sickness. For such deviations "natural physical repentance"⁴⁶ is needed. There are sins against the human spirit to which it responds with a sense of anguish

44 The author of the "all good" philosophy was Leibnitz and his opponent was Voltaire.

45 Rav Kook in Orot Hakodesh part 3, p. 66.

46 Rav Kook in Orot Hakodesh, chapter 1.

which we call pangs of conscience. Sometimes this type of sin even has a psychosomatic response in which there are negative **bodily** reactions. This phenomenon clearly shows the connection between mind and matter. The same relationship that exists, within man, between sin and sickness, pervades the whole world. There is a natural relationship between the material world or nature and between the moral state of the world. The natural world has an automatic, inner and Divine response to crimes against morality. This occurs because all the elements of the world are one united whole. There are states of spiritual depravity which the earth cannot tolerate. They cause, so to speak, a "stomach-ache" which results in convulsions that cause catastrophic devastation.

(There are all sorts of scientific discussions about the Deluge based on Torah verses and our Sages. One theory holds that the Flood was caused by the tilting of the earth off its original perpendicular state to an angle of 23 degrees. This deflection was supposed to have occurred as a result of a comet flying by close to the earth. This is reminiscent of our Sages' statement that Hashem brought the Flood by moving terrestrial bodies off course. The seasons were caused as a result of the deflection which fits in perfectly with the Divine promise after the flood "that summer and winter will never cease."⁴⁷ It is hard to know if there is any truth in these theories).

⁴⁷ Bereshit 8:22.

Many people have a dualistic view of the world. They think that there is the spiritual world and, alongside it, the physical world. These two worlds are separate and are controlled by different Divine forces. There is the material world over which one G-d rules and there is the world of spirit over which a "second" G-d rules. They view the four-lettered ineffable Name of Hashem (pronounced "Adonai" when reciting blessings and prayers and implies He was, He is and He will be) as an abstract theological name of a Being involved in the spiritual and moral aspects of life but with no connection to the practical and material side of existence. On the other hand, the name "Elohim" refers to the Almighty that acts within nature, as is intimated by the fact that its *Gematria*⁴⁸ is the same as the Hebrew word for "nature."⁴⁹ According to these dualists, there is no connection between these two ruling powers – each acts in its own sphere. Naturally man has obligations to both realms. Despite the fact that man is naturally obligated to act morally, however, they do not see any relationship between one's moral actions and material success in the physical world. This dualistic approach in which the two worlds are viewed as entirely separate is held by most people. It is true they do not give it a pagan garb in which they think of two different gods controlling the different realms in the world. However, they see the moral-spiritual world and the material-physical world as unconnected. According to this view, moral behavior

48 The numerical value of the letters in the Hebrew word (translator).

49 Nefesh Ha-Chayim, section 1, chapter 2.

does not advance or improve the practical world; nor is the reverse true, that improper behavior destroys the physical fabric of existence. G-d is thus "promoted" to being an inactive "honorary president of history." In contrast, we hold that: "Jewish morality⁵⁰ is not simply moral behavior of the individual or of the family, or of the nation or even of the whole of mankind, although these are naturally included, but it is principally Divine morality. It is the Torah of the Creator of the Universe which is the very continuation of the Creation. The Torah of Israel explains how the very existence of the world and human morality are interlinked and interdependent. It is thus evident that the very progress of the world is contingent upon moral advancement. That is the basis of Jewish faith."⁵¹ This concept is our main contribution to world philosophy and to the molding of humanity. Morality not only shapes the individual, the family, society, the nation and even all of human culture, but it influences and sustains the physical and technological world. We proclaim at the conclusion of *Neilah*:⁵² "G-d is the Almighty." The spiritual and abstract G-d (Adonai) is the same all powerful Almighty (Elohim), who controls the natural and physical world. There are seven forces at play in the natural world, which correspond to the seven days of Creation. We

⁵⁰ Rav Kook gives the word "morality" a far broader meaning than its dictionary definition. It means the harmonious and proper functioning of the entire universe, according to the Divine plan (translator).

⁵¹ Rav Kook in *Orot Hakodesh* vol. 3, p. 66.

⁵² The climactic prayer concluding the prayers of Yom Kippur.

thus declare seven times, "G-d is the Almighty," correlating to all these forces. We climax it with the affirmation of faith "Hear O Israel, G-d is our Almighty, G-d is one," all these forces are unified. The spiritual and material worlds, the moral and natural worlds, are all united and controlled by one overseeing power, Hashem. The relationship between the spiritual and material worlds is not a superficial and artificial one which exists simply because they have a common Supervisor who has decided to connect them. No! The world is not composed of two separate domains but is a unified whole created by the one Master of the Universe. He created an **intrinsic** bond between spirit and matter such that the material world's response to immorality is instinctive and automatic. "Man's sins so destroyed world morality that it was brimming with corruption...The world then convulsed and a flood descended to annihilate the whole of existence."⁵³ The deluge that resulted was a real tangible flood, not a tirade of moralizing words by a patron of morality who was detached from the physical world. The sin of robbing is what sealed the fate of the generation of the great Flood. Robbery is a corruption of the very basis of human morality. It is such an extreme perversion that it cannot be tolerated. Thus, "the most basic and effective approach to repentance...is the study of civil monetary obligations, the laws of inter-human relations contained in the *Choshen Mishpat* part of the code of Jewish Law. Such study must

⁵³ Rav Kook in *Orot Hakodesh* vol. 3, p. 66.

broadly span the whole spectrum of these laws, while also delving into the laws with the profoundest analysis. This rectifies lapses caused by one's desires and establishes Divine justice as the basis of our existence. It removes the pain of doubt and confusion from the soul by clearly illuminating our practical lives."⁵⁴

5. Human Races

Noach's sin of intoxication led to the disclosure of the different elements in the human race. Each of Noach's three sons had a specific spiritual character. Shem was holy, Yefet was secular and mundane and Cham was impure and unholy. Noach blessed the G-d of the holy Shem; "Blessed be Hashem, the G-d of Shem."⁵⁵ Shem is the great believer that cleaves to G-d, and in whose very soul the Divine Presence resides. It is he that is connected to the Divine, spiritual source of all existence. Only we, the Nation of Israel, spearhead this ideology of Shem in the world (even though the Arabs also are **called** "Semites," i.e. "from Shem"). Malki-Tzedek, the priest of G-d the Most High, was naturally the King of Yerushalayim where he met Avraham Avinu and blessed him: "Blessed be Avram of G-d, the Most High, Maker of heaven and earth."⁵⁶ He is none other than Shem,

⁵⁴ Rav Kook in Orot Hateshuvah, chapter 13, paragraph 5.

⁵⁵ Bereshit 9:26.

⁵⁶ Bereshit 14:18-20.

who is now very old. This blessing embodied Shem's spiritual heritage. G-d is lofty, spiritual and heavenly, "Most High;" but He is also the "Maker of heaven and earth" and actively controls all the forces at work in the world. By bringing bread and wine to Avram, Malki-Tzedek transferred to him his role as High Priest, and his spiritual heritage. Finally after nine generations, he had found a person who could continue his mission in the world. "He (Malki-Tzedek) revealed to him the laws of the High Priesthood and he also revealed Torah to him."⁵⁷

Yefet embodies all secular matters. Noach blessed Yefet with a play of words on his name: "Yaft Elokim Le'Yefet." Rashi quotes the Targum Onkolos which explains the word "Yaft" as meaning to enlarge or extend. The blessing thus means: May Hashem enable you to extend and broaden man's physical existence in the world.⁵⁸ **His** task is to develop all the secular matters in the world such as mathematics, physics, meta-physics, music and the like. Even his involvement in metaphysics is only in the secular sphere of human knowledge as opposed to Shem who is preoccupied with the spiritual side of existence with faith in Hashem.

There is, however, no clash between Shem and Yefet since there is no contradiction between holy matters and secular matters. When there is a firm basis of inner faith, then there is room for expansion outwards and for the development of

⁵⁷ Bereshit Rabbah 43 and see Nedarim 32b.

⁵⁸ Bereshit 9:27 and Rashi there.

human culture and science. Noach's blessing was: "May Hashem enable Yefet to expand our existence but may he dwell in the tents of Shem."

On one occasion our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook, traveled on a boat together with Saul Tschernichowski.⁵⁹ Tschernichowski held a poetry evening on which he read some of his literary creations. The following morning, he asked Rav Tzvi Yehudah if he was interested in hearing his poems. The Rav agreed. Tschernichowski, poised theatrically, began reciting his poems with great pathos. On completion, he said to the Rav: "you surprised me. As I was reciting I peeked at you and saw that you were actually listening." Rav Tzvi Yehudah replied: "and why not?" To this the poet said: "What do you, people concerned with religion and holy matters, have to do with secular poetry?" The Rav answered: "There is no incompatibility between holy matter and mundane, secular things. The conflict is between holiness and unholiness. Here there is an uncompromising battle." The Rav concluded: "Thus, perhaps it's feasible that you remedy with family situation."⁶⁰ Tschernichowski thought for a moment and then answered: "Perhaps." Perhaps at that moment he had thought of repentance.⁶¹

59 Hebrew poet and writer born in Russia in the Jewish year 5633 (about 130 years ago) (translator).

60 Tschernichowski was married to a gentile woman which is a cardinal sin in Judaism. It is in the sphere of "unholiness" (translator).

61 Such thought if sincere are effective. See Talmud, Kiddushin 49b and Maharil in his Erev Rosh Hashanah sermon (translator).

In contrast to Yefet, Cham is problematic. He is easily excited to promiscuous actions. He is the epitome of unholiness and impurity in mankind. We do not meet him half way. It is impossible for holiness to be connected in any way with unholiness. "Hashem wages a war against Amalek in all generations."⁶²

⁶² Shemot 17:16.

Haftarah for Parashat Noach

Unconditional Love

[Ashkekanzim and Yemenite Jews: Yeshayahu 54:1-55:5
Sefardim: Yeshayahu 54:1-10]

Can the covenant between the Master of the Universe and the Nation of Israel be cancelled on account of our sins?

This is one of the central claims of Christian theology: the Jews ceased being the Chosen Nation. The Nation of Israel remains only in body but not in spirit. We were replaced by "Verus Israel – the true Nation of Israel," which, according to their opinion, is Christianity.

This is certainly not the teaching of Yeshayahu in our Haftarah: "For the mountains may move and the hills falter, but my kindness will not move from you and My covenant of peace will not falter, says Hashem, who has mercy on You" (Yeshayahu 54:10).

There is no "Old Covenant" and there is no "New Covenant," just one eternal love of the Eternal G-d for His Nation, which is also eternal. This is the "love which is not dependent on anything" which is mentioned in Pirkei Avot

(5:20); it is not conditional and it therefore cannot be nullified. This is the love which we mention in "Shacharit" (the morning prayers) before the Shema, i.e. "Ahavah Rabbah" according to Ashkenazic tradition or "Ahavat Olam" according to Sefardic tradition.

The prophet Yirmiyahu is even more explicit: "Thus says Hashem, who gives the sun for a light during the day and the laws of the moon and stars for a light during the night, who sets the sea in motion and its wave to roar, the G-d of Hosts is His Name. If these laws move from before Me, says Hashem, then the offspring of Israel will also cease from being a Nation before Me forever. Thus says Hashem, if heaven above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below searched, then I will cast off all of the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, says Hashem" (Yirmiyahu 31:34:36). Just as the laws of nature are immutable, so too is the law of the great history of the Chosen Nation of Israel. Yirmiyahu emphasizes that "for all that they have done" (36), that is to say, despite all of our sins. Even if the entire natural world crumbles, the Nation of Israel – the soul of the world – will not be consumed.

In light of this incredible Divine love, how can we understand the Exile, and its horrible suffering, which we experienced for such a long period? The prophet Yeshayahu encouraged us to see this painful page of our history in the proper perspective: "For a brief moment have I forsaken you, but with great mercies will I gather you" (54:7). Is two

thousand years of Exile only a "brief moment"?! For the Master of the Universe, and in relation to eternity, yes it is! Israel pleasantly confirms this in the Psalms: "For a thousand years in Your eyes is like yesterday when it passed and like a watch in the night" (Tehillim 90:4). In fact, we passed through the worst night, but now the light of morning is shining on the horizon: "For you will break forth to the right and the left, and your offspring will possess nations and settle desolate cities" (Yeshayahu 54:3).

Are all of these events not materializing right before our very eyes? Instead of giving our attention to the bad news, which is spread daily by the media to depress us, we should once again read the optimistic, positive and realistic promises of the prophet Yeshayahu.

The truth of the matter is that the prophet already knew that it would be difficult for us to free ourselves from the trauma of the Exile, and the constant concern and fear of our wanderings. So he teaches us about trust in Hashem. "Do not fear, for you will not be shamed; and do not be humiliated, for you will not be mortified; but you will forget the shame of your youth, and you will not remember the mortification of your widowhood anymore" (4).

Do not lose trust in Hashem, nor in ourselves, because of the difficult "moment" in Exile. This period of lowliness and destruction is finished once and for all – "In the overflowing of wrath I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness, I will have mercy on you" (8).

The era of love has returned: "Break out into song and be joyous" (1), "Enlarge the place of your tent and stretch out the curtains of your dwellings, spare not" (2), "Stay away from oppression for you do not need to fear" (14).

The era of love has arrived.

LECH-LECHA

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1. "Look at the Rock From Which You Were Hewn"

The central theme of the section Lech-Lecha is Avraham Avinu. There is an exceptional prophetic directive to scrutinize his personality: "Look at the rock from which you were hewn and at the quarry from which you were dug. Look to your father Avraham and to Sarah who gave birth to you."⁶³ "Look" - examine and analyze! We must learn about both Avraham and Sarah, because they are "the rock from which we were hewn" and "the quarry from which we were dug." They are our source and we were created from them.

2. Our Spiritual Heritage From Our Forefathers

a. Avraham and Us

When we examine Avraham, we learn about ourselves. We have to know who we are, what we are and what our spiritual makeup is. This can be learned from a close scrutiny of our forefathers. The Torah has no intention of simply telling us interesting, historical stories about Avraham and his deeds. The stories of Avraham give us an insight into our inner reality. It informs us who we are.

b. The Deeds of the Forefathers Are an Indication of How Their Descendants Will Behave

The well-known principle, "that what befell the forefathers is

⁶³ Yeshayahu 51:1-2.

a sign of what will occur to their sons," was formulated by the Ramban.⁶⁴ This similarity of event between fathers and sons is not incidental, but stems from an inherent identity because the fathers and the sons are in fact one continuous chain and one single reality. The very character of the sons is contained in the fathers. There is a real spiritual continuity and heredity between the fathers and the sons. Their deeds are the same because their inner makeup is identical. It is quite possible that at a given time this identity will not manifest itself but deep down it is there and will eventually become apparent.

c. "Who Visits⁶⁵ the Sins of the Fathers Upon the Children"

The conformity between the fathers and sons also exists in the negative sense. This is expressed in the verse, "[G-d] visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the sons even to the third and fourth generations"⁶⁶ and "The parents have eaten sour grapes but their children's teeth are set on edge."⁶⁷ One instinctively asks, "Is it fair that fathers sin and the sons are punished?" Our Sages explain this idea in the following fable composed by Rabbi Meir (It is said that when Rabbi Meir

64 E.g. The Ramban's commentary on Bereshit 12:7, and numerous other places in his commentary. This expression does not appear in the Gemara but was coined by the Ramban. The closest term in the Talmud or Midrash is the statement that, "whatever happened to Avraham also occurred to his sons (Midrash Tanchuma, Lech Lecha 9).

65 Punishes.

66 Shemot 20:4 and elsewhere.

67 Yirmiyahu 31:29.

died the composers of fables ceased,⁶⁸ because he was the storyteller par excellence and had three hundred parables on foxes alone). On one occasion a fox enticed a wolf to help the Jews prepare food for Shabbat. When he arrived, however, the Jews took sticks and beat him. Angrily the wolf caught the fox with the intention of devouring it. The fox claimed that it was not his fault, they have a grudge against his father who once helped them prepare but then ate all of the good food. The indignant wolf replied, "Was I beaten for my father's misbehavior?" "Yes," replied the fox, "the fathers ate sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge."⁶⁹ The fox then cunningly saved its skin by saying, "If you free me, I will show you where you can get tasty, choice cheese to eat." He led him to a well on which two buckets were hanging, attached to the two ends of a rope. The fox got in to the upper bucket and descended into the well while the lower bucket was drawn up. The fox pointing at the cheese-like reflection of the moon said to the wolf, "Come on down, there is plenty of food here." The wolf entered the second bucket and descended, while the fox in the second bucket was drawn up. The wolf complained, "How do I get out of here?" The fox replied with a verse, "the righteous is delivered out of trouble and the wicked comes in his stead."⁷⁰

68 Sotah 49b.

69 Yirmiyahu ibid.

70 Mishlei 11:8.

It is true that the sons are not punished indefinitely but only up to the third and fourth generation as the above-quoted verse says.⁷¹ But what is the justice and logic even in this equation? It is reasonably understandable if the "sons continue in the [wicked] ways of the fathers,"⁷² but what if they do not? A little deeper insight can explain why even when the sons do not sin they are still punished for their father's sins. It can be compared to a pregnant mother who seriously neglects her health. The child born will almost inevitably suffer from some impairment. What is this baby to blame? He is not to blame; but he is still suffering for the "sins" of the mother. Another analogy could be that of parents with bad character traits which the children, despite their innocence, acquire because of the environment in which they were raised.

Let's delve a little deeper. Every person inherits a parental heritage for good and for bad. If a person were to complain that it is not fair for him to suffer for his parents wrongs, the simple answer would be that he also enjoys the benefits of the positive heritage. The positive heritage is far more effective and long term than the negative legacy. This is testified to by the verse, "who visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the sons to the third and fourth generation," whereas concerning those who love G-d, it states, "I show love for thou-

⁷¹ Shemot *ibid.* and elsewhere.

⁷² Berachot 7a and Sanhedrin 27b.

sands of generations."⁷³ We complain about punishment because of our parents but forget to appreciate all of the good we have received through them. Let us conjure up how the world looked several thousand years ago when man was still climbing trees. The world today is unrecognizably different - culturally, spiritually and technologically - because of all of the educational effort that was invested over that period. This did not occur overnight but as the result of development over the generations. We benefit from the sum total of human progress in all of these areas and in particular from the direct influence of our fathers. But we also suffer from the mistakes that they made. Is this unfair? Together with the diversified and rich gift which we have received from former generations we have also received an incomparably smaller injurious inheritance. No person can construe himself as a lone creature unrelated to the human race. All of the generations are one continuous chain which together make up one soul, the Divine vitality which is gradually unfolding for better or for worse, over the course of history.

d. Israel Is Clearly Descended From Avraham

The character traits of our forefathers are deeply rooted in our own psyche. Maran (our revered teacher) Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Cohain Kook, in his commentary to

⁷³ Shemot 20:5.

the *Akeidah*,⁷⁴ explains that the self-sacrifice which Avraham manifested implanted the strength to show unconditional self-sacrifices for G-d. We are a Nation replete with self-sacrifice. Avraham Avinu was willing to sacrifice not only his beloved and only son but even all future generation of the entire Jewish Nation, even though Hashem had promised, "and I will make you a mighty Nation."⁷⁵ While there is a willingness to sacrifice one's physical life, Avraham Avinu was even prepared to forgo his spiritual life viz. the spreading in the world of all of his ideals by his progeny. This supreme trait has been ingrained in us, all of his offspring, by his deed.

Avraham is also a great man of faith as it says, "and he believed in G-d."⁷⁶ We also inherited this characteristic. We are a Nation of believers in G-d. When Moshe Rabbenu, on being sent to lead the redemption from Egyptian slavery, said to G-d, "they will not believe me,"⁷⁷ he was admonished by Hashem. He was told that they would believe him since they are believing sons, who have inherited this characteristic from their believing fathers.

e. A Nation of Believers

Faith is an inherent part of our national character despite

74 In *Olat Re'eiyah* vol. 1, p. 97. This also appears in an earlier book of Rav Chaim of Volozhin – *Ruach Chaim* 5:3.

75 *Bereshit* 12:2.

76 *Bereshit* 15:6.

77 *Shemot* 4:1 and *Shabbat* 97a.

the fact that there are Jews who do not "actively" believe. In a well-known saying, Maran Ha-Rav Kook has revealed to us a deep truth about the Jewish soul. He said: "The greatest atheist among the Jews has more faith than the greatest believer among the non-Jews."⁷⁸ This seems a strange statement as we see that there are many non-believing Jews. The real meaning is that in the very depth of their soul they believe since they possess the characteristic of the Nation to which they belong. This, however, has yet to surface to a conscious level in these individuals. This can be compared to an expert musician who states that a certain child is a musical genius, even though the child cannot even play the flute. The explanation is that the musician is describing the inner talent of the child which may not be evident since he may be too lazy to practice. We must find a way to encourage him to hone his talent.⁷⁹ The fact that the talent is not apparent does not mean that it does not exist. On the other hand, not everyone can be a musician. It is a talent from birth. If a person is not born with it, all the lessons in the world will not help to develop what is not there.

This is the case with us. Ingrained within our very essence is the talent and predisposition for faith, even if not every Jew "actively" believes. Some non-Jews may also have faith, but intense and deep faith as a national quality only exists within Israel.

⁷⁸ Maamrei Re'eiyah p. 457; Le-Gimmel Elul part 2, p. 17.

⁷⁹ This also applies to our "non-believing," Jewish brothers (translator).

3. An Inner Quality⁸⁰ or a Matter of Choice (viz. Talent or Effort)

a. The Choice Reveals the Quality

Question: From the aforementioned, can one conclude that "faith" is not a characteristic that a person can choose to acquire or to forego but is simply an inherent trait?

Answer: Let's continue the musical analogy. A person born with a musical talent can chose to cultivate it or neglect it. The objective basis of his success, however, is not his training which is subjective, but the fact that he is talented.⁸¹ Without the basic talent all of the effort in the world will not help. Once the characteristic exists, however, voluntary effort can help realize this potential ability. Faith is a state of close attachment to Hashem. We are a Nation that was created with an inner drive to cling to G-d. Sometimes the quality of faith consciously fills one's life, but if it does not we must actively help it reach the conscious level. Faith will only permeate the whole of the world after a great deal of hard work.

Question: If we are in essence a believing Nation why is it that we do not see it in practice?

Answer: The same question can be asked about the whole of mankind. Man was created "in the image of G-d".⁸² This

⁸⁰ Called "*segulah*" in Hebrew.

⁸¹ This explains why so much emphasis is placed on the *segulah*. It is an unchangeable "given" while effort may or may not be forthcoming (translator).

⁸² Bereshit 1:27.

fact is not very apparent in human history.⁸³ Frequently this inner Divine image does not manifest itself and a conscious effort has to be made to bring it out. A person's inherent nature cannot be created by a conscious decision but educational efforts can help it realize itself. The term "*segulah*" refers to one's essential makeup not to a certain behavioral pattern which may or may not truly express one's essence. Human nature is in the "image of G-d"⁸⁴ and is thus good as the verse states, "G-d has made man upright."⁸⁵ This seems to be contradicted by a verse elsewhere which states, "every impulse of his innermost thought was only for evil all day long."⁸⁶ The explanation is that Hashem created man pure and perfect. Evil is not a Divine creation but a result of man's encounter with all of the confusion and complications of this world. As a result, his inherently good disposition is not revealed and a great deal of conscious effort has to be made over the generations to bring out his innately good nature.

b. Avraham's *Segulah*

Avraham Avinu also has innate characteristics with which he was created, while his actions are left to his own free choice. He has no choice whether to be Avraham Avinu or not

83 On the contrary, most of human history demonstrates "man's inhumanity to man" (translator).

84 Bereshit 1:27.

85 Kohelet 7:29.

86 Bereshit 6:5.

because Hashem created him as such. We read in Pirkei Avot, "The Holy One Blessed Be He has [specifically] declared five possessions His own in His world:⁸⁷ One - the Torah. Two - Heaven and Earth. Three – Avraham. Four – Israel. Five - the Temple. Avraham was created as a special personality by Hashem and this fact is unchangeable. He can act against his inner nature as an "anti-Avraham," but that cannot alter his intrinsic makeup whatsoever.

c. Great Talents Used For Evil

Throughout human history certain outstanding personalities have used their powerful talents for evil. Bilaam, for example, was so gifted that our Sages compared his remarkable capacity to that of Moshe Rabbenu's.⁸⁸ But he used it for despicable, depraved purposes. "That Man,"⁸⁹ Yeshu⁹⁰ the Christian, had rarely prodigious talents yet because of his depraved character everything turned sour and was used for evil.⁹¹ Shabbtai Tzvi, may the name of the wicked rot, is another example. Everyone who knew him recognized him as a towering personality. He, however, succumbed to his

87 i.e. five things that Hashem specifically cherishes and has so to speak made His personal possession (Tiferet Yisrael on the Mishnayot) (translator).

88 Sifri on Devarim 34:10.

89 A derogatory connotation of Jesus.

90 The letters of this abbreviation are the initials of the Hebrew words for "may his name and memory be erased."

91 Igrot Re'eiyah vol. 2, p. 34.

ignominious passions instead of elevating and sanctifying himself.

d. Can Our Actions Affect the *Segulah*?

Each of us has a special and distinct soul made in the image of G-d. The soul cannot be modified for it is a spark of the Divine within us. Hashem calls upon us to realize the full potential of our souls in our actions. If we do so we will be fulfilled, but if not we will feel internal frustration. There is no compulsion – it is up to us. Whatever our choice is, however, our divinely molded inner essence will never disappear, nor even be altered, since it is a Divine creation.

e. The *Segulah* of the Jewish Nation (*Klal Yisrael*)

Question: What is the meaning of the statement: "That *Klal Yisrael* has no free choice"?

Answer: This statement and others like it such as "*Klal Yisrael* is eternal" do not refer to individuals but to the Nation as a whole. The term "*Klal*" has two different connotations. One meaning is: the sum total of individuals that make up the Nation. The other more abstract meaning is: the common characteristic that all the components of the Nation possess, i.e. the *segulah*, the inner holiness that every Jew possesses by virtue of the fact that he is part of the Jewish Nation. Hence when it is said that *Klal Yisrael* has no free choice; it does not mean that all of the individuals are robots and cannot, for example, choose whether to act in a

holy manner or in an unholy manner. No! The individuals can choose to act in a good manner or to act badly. However, the national characteristic of holiness that all of the individuals possess in their inner essence is unchangeable and cannot be nullified. This is a fact of Creation which is beyond the realm of free choice.

4. *Am Segulah* – A Select Nation

a. Avraham – The Source of the Nation

Avraham Avinu is the origin of the Jewish Nation. The novelty in Avraham Avinu is not his personal righteousness, for pious individuals such as *Noach*,⁹² *Chanoch*, *Shem* and *Ever* existed before him. Avraham Avinu was, however, the root and source of a holy Nation. Now an entire Nation of righteous people was about to appear on the world scene.

b. Universalism and Nationalism

Avraham's designation as "the father of the multitude of nations"⁹³ indicates his responsibility for the whole of mankind. This responsibility was visibly manifested when Hashem informed him of his intention to annihilate Sedom. Avraham as "the father of the multitude of nations" recognized his responsibility and stepped in to intervene on their

92 Bereshit 6:9 reads, "Noach was a perfectly righteous man...Noach walked with G-d."

93 Bereshit 17:5.

behalf. Avraham's moral obligation to mankind emanated from the fact that he was the source of the Nation of Israel, who had received this task. The task was to be a blessing to the nations of the world⁹⁴ by instructing them and redeeming them from both spiritual and physical perils.

There are Jewish thinkers who claim that our mission is to be "a light to the nations" which can only be performed when we are living dispersed among the nations such that we can bring them the morality of the Tanach. Their view is based on a misunderstanding of the verse in Yeshayahu where Hashem says to the Nation of Israel:⁹⁵ "I have made you the Nation of my covenant, a light to the nations." We will not be a light to the nations scattered as individuals in Pressburg, Johannesburg or Williamsburg. On the contrary, we can only effectively illuminate the world as a healthy Nation living in its homeland. Obviously, even as a forcibly dispersed Nation in the Exile, we did our best and our influence was conspicuous wherever we lived. But this was only a pale imitation of the real thing. We are destined to be a massive searchlight illuminating all of the darkness, but this is only possible when we are a Nation in our homeland.

Question: Is it correct to infer from the fact that Avraham is the father of all mankind that all the nations must become Jewish?

94 Bereshit 12:3.

95 Yeshayahu 42:6.

Answer: Rashi, in his commentary on the Torah,⁹⁶ hints at this very question. Avraham's name was originally "Avram" which is an acronym meaning "the father of Aram." This means that he was a national leader, the father of his nation, Aram. Later, however, his name (and together with it his mission) was changed to "Avraham" which indicates his universal task as "the father of the multitude of nations." A remnant of his former name remains in his new name which shows that despite his new universal character, he still retains his national character. He is both universal and particularistic. This is not an anomaly, for the Kuzari says: "Israel is the heart of the nations"⁹⁷ or as the Zohar puts it: "the mind of the nations."⁹⁸ The comparison to the essential limbs, the heart and the mind, indicates that Israel is a different level of existence from the rest of mankind which could be compared to the inessential limbs, such as the leg or ear. We are the central life force present in humanity. However, it must also be remembered that the heart is only of significance when it is connected with the rest of the body, but not as a detached limb sitting in isolation.

We are linked to the rest of the nations and have a responsibility towards them, but we are also distinct and separate from them. Along with them, we possess the Divine image that exists in mankind, but we are above them from our

⁹⁶ Rashi, Bereshit 17:5.

⁹⁷ Kuzari 2:36.

⁹⁸ Zohar, Mishpatim 108. See Orot Yisrael of Rav Kook 1, 1.

external vantage point, "as a Nation that will dwell alone, not counting itself among the nations."⁹⁹ We must use our special characteristics to help them. This state of connection and separateness can be exemplified by the world of ideas. There are ideas that are common to both Jews and non-Jews and it makes no difference if they were conceived by Aristotle or, *lehavdil*,¹⁰⁰ by the Rambam. These ideas are broad concepts, well beyond national distinctions. A second category of thought is one where the idea is universal but the style in which it is stated is specific to each nation. Therefore, they have to be specially adapted to our specific national style before they can be adopted. This is unlike the first category that can be adopted without any alterations. There is a third class of ideas which are distinctly ours. Regarding them, we are "as a Nation that will dwell alone, not counting itself among the nations." These ideas are specifically ours and have no connection whatsoever with the non-Jews. This example in the sphere of ideas also applies to the practical world. We and our forefather Avraham are one and act identically. Avraham was connected to the nations as "the father of the multitude of nations," but also a "mighty nation;"¹⁰¹ naturally separated from the nations and also a source of blessing to them. In the same way, we

99 Bamidbar 23:9.

100 Not to be compared with the aforementioned. A term used to differentiate between the holy and the mundane.

101 Bereshit 12:2.

are both nationalist and universalistic at the same time and a source of blessing for the entire world.

c. Why a Whole Nation?

Why is an entire nation required in order to help humanity? Why can't the task be performed by appropriate individuals? Nations inevitably contain people of varying levels, many of whom are not ideally suited for the task. This is hinted at by the letters of the Hebrew word for "public" – "tzibur." The Arizal explains that the word is an acronym for "tzadik – righteous," "benoni – mediocre" and "resha'im – wicked," i.e. communities contain all sorts of people. For example, every nation has its thieves. In the early days of modern Israel, people would leave their homes open in Tel Aviv because there was no fear of thieves. Then an "historic" event occurred, peculiarly enough, the first thief was caught in the Jewish city. As time went by, there were further "developments." People started complaining about the deterioration: "What sort of state is this with thieves and murderers?! We expected something entirely different." That's simple naivety. Are there nations without murderers! It is true that there are far fewer here than outside of Israel, but that is little comfort. Obviously, a state has criminals, despite all of our efforts to prevent crime.

The Torah itself commands us to designate refuge cities for inadvertent murderers. What - a refuge for murderers in the Holy Land?! Yes! True, it is for unintentional murderers, but

they have a degree of responsibility for although it was inadvertent, they were not acting under duress. For instance, if a person chopping wood did not carefully check his axe head and it flew off and killed another person, he is not completely blameless. The same goes for a person who caused a fatal accident by speeding on the roads. While there is no intent, there is clearly criminal negligence. We have to recognize the fact that a nation with a state will inevitably have negative phenomena that need to be corrected.

d. Israel's Mission – A National One

So the question remains, why choose an entire nation including the unsavory characters to serve as a blessing to mankind? Apparently a better approach would be to make an "International Society of Idealists," which would be comprised of descendants of Avraham Avinu and all good and upright people of many nations, working together for the moral betterment of mankind. There are such societies which have enormous world-wide power with numerous well-financed branches, influential personalities and a broad network of humanitarian projects. Sometimes the power of such societies is so great that they determine the course of political events.

Hashem, however, did not work upon these lines, since creating a small cadre of virtuous men, each living in his private ivory tower, is not the purpose of history. The purpose is to

create a noble nation with righteous agriculturalists, industrial workers, men of commerce, etc..., ranging from the spiritual intelligentsia down to the lowest proletariat.¹⁰² Thus far attention had been given to creating worthy and righteous individuals which itself is no simple task. An incomparably greater sanctification of Hashem's Name and achievement, however, is the formulation of a holy nation that is motivated by a Divine ideal. It is true that this is a far more arduous task, and the more complex the society the more difficult it is, but this is the mission. This is the new turn that history takes with Avraham Avinu. Until his time, the Divine call for ethical behavior had been directed to the individual, in the form of the Seven Noahide Laws, while the public and national aspect had been ignored. Avraham, with his special talent, opened a new era in human history. This is not by chance. Hashem had created him with this aptitude and thus informs him, "And I will make of you a mighty Nation"¹⁰³ – you are the root and seed and from your loins will grow a pre-eminent nation. This Jewish Nation will be a blessing to the entire world.

5. A Mighty Nation

a. Man's Greatness

The greatness of our Nation is not in numbers, but in that element which differentiates man from the rest of creation,

¹⁰² Orot, p. 104.

¹⁰³ Bereshit 12:2.

namely the Divine image within us. We are a foremost Nation in morality, in closeness to Hashem and in everything through which G-d's goodness can be manifested.¹⁰⁴

b. A Nation That is Not Great

Several years ago was the 200th anniversary of American independence. The Founding Fathers really wanted to create an ideal state. People persecuted in their lands of origin found refuge in America and decided to create a state of truth, justice and goodness where people would not suffer as they had. Everyone would be able to live happily there irrespective of their national origins, religion or race. This was a wonderful ideal which generated broad world-wide enthusiasm for several decades. Today, it is very dubious if we can honestly say that America is the ideal state. It is not worse than others but it is not much better either. Despite the inscription on the dollar bill "In G-d We Trust," the state is not run upon Divine ideals. It is a country that is deeply sunk into mammonism¹⁰⁵ and meaningless vanities.¹⁰⁶ This is definitely not a "great nation." With the appearance of Avraham, mankind reaches maturity. The time has come when the creation of a holy nation can begin.

¹⁰⁴ Devarim 4:7.

¹⁰⁵ Worship of materialism.

¹⁰⁶ A play on words employing the Aramaic ring of the name "America" which means "an empty nation" ("Ama Reika").

c. Sanctification of Our Entire Existence

The purpose of Judaism can be highlighted by contrasting it to our distorted and "illegitimate daughter" religions. Islam is a "deformed son," but it is tolerable. It is customary to say that Islam is "Judaism for the Arabs." This is not an insult but rather shows Muhammad particular knack (he was not a philosopher) for knowing what parts of Judaism were compatible with the Arab psyche. He thus weaned them away from idolatry. They have other shortcomings, but idol worship is not one of them. In contrast, Christianity is an entirely different world. It has no interest in nationalism and the material world. They say, "Give to G-d what is G-d's and to Ceasar what is Ceasar's," i.e. let the state deal with all the political and national matters while we, the religious leaders, are only concerned with matters of the soul. National matters belong to politics and are thus lowly and secular in the realm of Ceasar, not of religion. They view the body as wicked and controlled by the devil. This very approach, of refusing to get involved in mundane matters, surrenders them to the control of the devil. Therefore, all of these cultured and refined religious leaders deal with intellectual and moral matters and leave national matters to vulgar lowlifes. Hashem utterly rejects this idea. A mighty nation is one which sanctifies the whole of life, both the spiritual and material aspects of existence.

d. The Difference Between Individual Holiness and National Holiness

A cardinal human problem is how to base national existence on the principles of righteousness and honesty. The non-Jews do not know and never will know, since they are not endowed with the basic characteristic to do so. There are good and worthy individual non-Jews, whose virtue comes from the fact that every single person is created in the image of G-d. We, however, draw all of our idealistic qualities from the spirit of the Nation. Our righteousness and goodness stem from the fact that each of us is a limb of the national body and thus the same national soul permeates all of us. "He (G-d) chose us from all of the nations and gave us His Torah."¹⁰⁷ The emphasis is that He chose us as a Nation and granted us characteristics of Torah and morality that are common to all the members of this mighty Nation.

6. The Formation of the Jewish Nation

As mentioned, the appearance of Avraham constitutes a sudden transition and a leap forward in the course of human history. After the elapse of two thousand years from the Creation, Hashem announced that humanity had come of age for His Name to be borne by an entire nation and not only by individuals. Avraham was the root of this Nation. The advent of such a Nation is not sudden but takes time. After

¹⁰⁷ The first blessing said over the study of Torah.

Avraham came Yitzchak, Yaakov, Yaakov's twelve sons, and the descent to Egypt of his seventy descendants. In Egypt, hundreds of years elapse during which the embryonic Nation evolves and then we are born during the Exodus from Egypt.

Question: Doesn't it seem more plausible to say that we only became a Nation when we received the Torah on Mt. Sinai?

Answer: Our status as a Nation was established before the "Giving of the Torah." In Egypt, we were already designated as a Nation as it says, "The Jewish Nation is too numerous and strong for us"¹⁰⁸ and "Let My Nation go, that they may serve Me in the desert."¹⁰⁹ We were born in Egypt but our inner spiritual make-up only became apparent when the Torah was given to us. This can be compared to a baby who only performs basic physiological activities at first, but reveals his inner character when he grows up and is educated.

7. A Nation – A New Reality

When the Nation materialized, a new and special Divine Presence rested upon this new phenomenon. In Parashat Vaera, Hashem said to Moshe Rabbenu, "I revealed myself to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov using My name El Shaddai, but I did not reveal My greater name, Hashem, to

¹⁰⁸ Shemot 1:9.

¹⁰⁹ Shemot 7:16.

them."¹¹⁰ The higher level of Divine manifestation was not given to our forefathers, despite all of their greatness, since they are only the root of the Nation but not yet the Nation proper. The higher level of Divine revelation was given to Moshe Rabbenu, however, not because of his individual superiority over the forefathers, but as the representative of the Nation (which now existed).¹¹¹ Only the Nation was worthy of receiving the superior Divine Name. A certain philosopher holds that there is a fifth level of reality above: 1. inanimate matter, 2. vegetation, 3. animals, and 4. Human beings – and it is the nation. Just as a human being is an entirely new level of existence above animals, so is the nation. It is in fact a more sophisticated and highly developed level of reality above the individual human being. Furthermore, just as a plant is not simply a conglomeration of atoms of inanimate matter but possesses a new and vital interrelationship between the component parts, so too a nation is not simply a random collection of individuals that happen to be geographically adjacent to each other. On the contrary, all of the members of the nation have a special vital and mutual relationship with one another one drawing from and manifesting the unique and common spirit which they all possess. The formation of this unique national level began with Avraham Avinu.

¹¹⁰ Shemot 6:3. For an explanation of the different levels of Divine manifestations revealed in these different names, see Parashat Shemot on this book, section B notes 14-15.

¹¹¹ "Go, say to the Children of Israel, I am Hashem" (Shemot 6:6).

5. Avraham's Outstanding Character

a. Ten Ordeals

The history of Avraham Avinu is summarized by our Sages in the following sentence: "Avraham Avinu was tested with ten ordeals and withstood them all – to show the degree of Avraham Avinu's love for G-d."¹¹²

1. Ten Dimensions of the Spiritual World

Pirkei Avot¹¹³ outlines Hashem's cosmo-historical master plan for the world: "There were ten generations between Adam and Noach," "There were ten generation between Noach and Avraham" and "Avraham was tested with ten ordeals." They all appear in segments of ten. Similarly, ten Jews are required in order to recite the special prayers of holiness called the "*Kedushah*." In fact all of the 613 mitzvot can be classified as secondary to the Ten Commandments.¹¹⁴ There are "piyutim" (liturgical poems) called "*Azharot*" which some people recite on the holiday of Shavuot, which categorize the 613 mitzvot according to the Ten Commandments.

What is the significance of the number ten? The Maharal explains¹¹⁵ that the spiritual world has ten dimensions, much as the physical world has three dimensions. The Ten Com-

¹¹² Pirkei Avot 5:4.

¹¹³ Ibid. 5:1-4.

¹¹⁴ See the article "On the 613 Mitzvot" in the book, "The Writings of the Ramban."

¹¹⁵ The Maharal in Derech Chaim, chap. 5 mishnah 1, p. 215.

mandments are the ten dimensions of the ethical-moral world. The theological world is also based on ten dimensions as indicated in the statement "that the world was created by ten divine utterances"¹¹⁶ – these are ten expressions of the Divine will that wants all the variegated facts of existence to be created.

2. The World Was Created With Ten Divine Utterances

Question: What is the meaning of our Sages' statement "that the world was created with ten divine utterances in order to exact punishment from the wicked who destroy the world which was created with ten utterances and to reward the righteous who sustain the world which was created with ten utterances"?¹¹⁷

Answer: A world created with ten pronouncements is one of gradual development, in which there is room for human effort. A world created by a single word means that the perfect final product has come immediately into existence. Only in a world that emerges from its primordial state, gradually, is there room for man to participate in the world's improvement. Thus man bears responsibility, and is rewarded for his successes and punished for his faults. The tenth utterance, heralding the creation of man, is in fact an announcement of the perpetual continuation of Creation via man's efforts to improve and develop himself morally and spiritually throughout the course of history.

¹¹⁶ Pirkei Avot 5:1. They are called the Ten "*Sefirot*" in the Kabbalah.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

3. Avraham Was Tested With Ten Trials

The ten ordeals that Avraham underwent were not the sum total of his private suffering, since he in fact experienced many more personal difficulties. They are, however, the ten different types of tests that a person can undergo. Avraham's personality was gradually built up from test to test. Each test added an extra level to his character.¹¹⁸

b. "To Show How Cherished He [Avraham] Was"

Avraham was tried in order to reveal the inner worth and virtue which he possessed. It is important to manifest his true merit to the world.

1. Cherished is Man Who Was Created In The Image [of G-d]

It says in Pirkei Avot:¹¹⁹ "cherished is man who was created in the image [of G-d]. Greater love was evidence by it being made known to him that man was made in the image of G-d."¹²⁰ That man was created in the image of G-d is a Divine and immutable fact. It is true that a person can deny this fact and act as if it were not true but the reality is unchangeable. A man cannot turn into a bird, for example, even if he attaches wings and feathers to himself and tries to fly, he will remain a human being who possesses a pure and Divine soul despite the fact that his actions do not reflect this reality. This is the inner Divine "worth" and "virtue"

¹¹⁸ The Maharal in Derech Chaim, chap. 5 mishnah 3.

¹¹⁹ Pirkei Avot 3:18.

¹²⁰ Bereshit 9:6.

of man, which exists irrespective of his actions and which we must salute with awe.

2. Extra Special Worth Is Evinced When He Is Conscious of This Fact¹²¹

It is however important that man be aware of his special status. "Awareness" here means that he is consciously willing to act according to his Divinely elevated state. The word "aware" or "know" in the Mishnah would parallel its meaning in the verse "And Adam 'knew' Chavah his wife,"¹²² which means that he was vitally connected to the matter and not simply intellectually conscious of the fact. When this Divine image is consciously lived by man he has special double worth – the basic unchangeable fact plus the "extra worth" which is the possibility to actively, and of his own free choice, use this talent and to ascend to even greater spiritual heights. The fact that man was created in the image of G-d is an absolute and objective reality about our soul which is called the "*Segulah*" and it exists irrespective of whether it is used or not. The personal effort, however, that is then invested in ascending is a subjective and optional element of free choice.

3. Beloved Is Israel For They Are Called Children of Hashem Within mankind which was created in the image of G-d,

¹²¹ The interpretation here does not follow the plain translation brought above (translator).

¹²² Bereshit 4:1.

there an inner select (*segulah*) group named Israel. They are called the "Children of Hashem." Our special status as the "firstborn son" means that we have an extraordinarily strong bond with Hashem and enjoy special Divine illumination. We are a unique spark of the general image of G-d in mankind. Every single Jew, righteous or wicked, man or woman, adult or child, is included in the category of "Children of Hashem."

4. Especially Beloved is Israel When It Knows That It Is The Child of G-d

The Jew can ascend to an even higher level if he recognizes and acts according to this special inner makeup (*segulah*). When this quality is known and lived by the Jew following the Torah, which is the expression of his inner nature, then he is "especially beloved." There are innumerable levels of this recognition. There are those who try to deny it. There are those who manifest it partially by performing some or all of the mitzvot automatically without much devotion. And there are those who live the Torah heart and soul with unlimited dedication.

5. "Manifesting Avraham's Unique Character"¹²³

Avraham was created by G-d as a giant of the human spirit, possessing a unique soul (*segulah*). He lived up to his

¹²³ Pirkei Avot 5:4. The translation follows the explanation given here (translator).

"Abrahamic" nature throughout the course of his life and his actions, demonstrating his inner character to the world.

6. The Acknowledge of Hashem In The World

The whole purpose of Creation is for Hashem to reveal Himself in the world. This is indicated in the verse, "and I did not allow them [the forefathers] to know Me by My name, Hashem."¹²⁴ The implication is that by disclosing to Moshe this deeper name, which reveals a more profound aspect of Himself, the world is progressing towards its objective – the manifestation of G-d in the world. The Zohar also states that the purpose of Creation is for Hashem "to become known"¹²⁵ and manifest among His creations. There is no answer in human terms to the question "why does G-d want to reveal Himself?" The Arizal¹²⁶ himself said that he did not know. How then can we expect to know? After all, the answers to the chain of questions of "why" will eventually reach an impasse where the answer is, "We do not know." All these questions, however, are not from Hashem's point of view. We do not and cannot know why Hashem decided to create the world. The question "why" is from our viewpoint. That is what we should conclude and understand from the fact that He created the world. The conclusion is that Hashem wants to illuminate all of His creatures with His

¹²⁴ Shemot 6:3. See above in section D-7 with footnotes.

¹²⁵ Zohar – part 1, p. 235a and see also part 2, p. 42a.

¹²⁶ He was one of the outstanding Jewish mystics of all time. He lived about 450-500 years ago.

light and man must therefore participate and reveal all his inner, G-d-given capacity in the world.

c. Avraham Withstood All of The Trials

1. The Purpose of Trials

Translating all of one's potential into action is no simple task. It involves struggling with opposing forces. This is the essence of a trial and a person might succeed or fail. Unlike the "*segulah*," Israel's intrinsic G-d-given soul of which we are assured that "Israel's eternal Divine soul will never be falsified or changed,"¹²⁷ man's self-made effort has no guarantee of success, but depends on the degree of energy he exerts in the endeavor. A trial presents a challenge to a person to succeed to perform his task despite the hurdles. If a person passes this test he has surpassed the level that he was at previously. We must be aware of the cardinal rule: Hashem will not beset a person with trials that are beyond his capacity to overcome. We believe in a G-d of goodness who has no desire to cause the downfall of His creatures. The whole purpose is to uplift man and help him progress. By being forced to grapple with difficult situations, a person discovers and activates hidden talents and strengthens and thus ascends. This is similar to math exercises which are arranged and graded such that if the student uses his brain and the material learned so far, he will succeed. Further-

¹²⁷ Shmuel 1 15:29. There are several explanations of this verse. The translation follows the interpretation as given in this book (translator).

more, the exercises are essential for him to really understand the theoretical material that has been taught so far. Theory is not enough. Success is not always immediate, he must persevere and finally he will progress. The "exercises" in life are the trials. In brief, trials are to help man advance. Life confronts us with all sorts of hardships such as harsh weather conditions, poverty, weakness or a broken spirit, but we must courageously overcome our despair. Resoluteness, when there are no problems is no "big deal." The real feat is to be able to fill oneself with hope and courage at a time of despair. A state of despair is a golden opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah of overcoming obstacles. We should thus expectantly wait for such despair and when it arrives not let it elude us, but rejoice that we now have a chance to apply all the theory that we have learned. This very joy dissipates the despair. There are three approaches to the adversities of life. One who ignores all the misfortunes and prohibitions views life as smooth sailing without any problems or limitations. Our Sages call this "the drunkard's attitude," as it says in Mishlei:¹²⁸ "One who indulges in his cup, the entire world appears to him like a plain." The second view is the complete opposite. It views life's hurdles as completely insurmountable, and our struggles are thus a lost cause. The third view is our Jewish view, on which we do not disregard anything and are fully aware of all predicaments and setbacks in life, but we are also determined to struggle and

¹²⁸ This is one of the explanations given in the Gemara Yoma 75a of this verse in Mishlei 23:31 (translator).

overcome them. They are not an impediment but, on the contrary, an aid. Without the tests, these talents would remain unrealized and latent. Hashem, the Creator of man, knows exactly what talents He has implanted within each of us and only sends us those trials that will help us translate them into reality. There is no reason, however, to look for trials as life itself presents more than enough.

As mentioned, trials are a happy challenge, not an intolerable burden. It is much like a young child who tries to skip steps on the staircase or tries to eat spaghetti with a drinking straw and when he succeeds he is thrilled. Why does he complicate his life? Why doesn't he do things the easy way? The fact is, however, that the child tries these challenges since he has all sorts of talents and strengthens which he wants to use and activate (a child's bubbling energy should not be suppressed even when we see that it's being used for foolish purposes. What should be done is to channel it to constructive and important ends). This is the case with man in general. Trails are the challenges of life.

In brief, The Holy One Blessed Be He created the world in order to become known and manifested in the world. This is done via man who was created in the image of G-d, and especially via Israel who is the special elect Nation (*segulah*) of all of the nations. Its ability to withstand trials reveals its full strength. There are those who interpret the word for trial (*nesayon*) as being derived from the word for flag or banner

(nes), i.e. the trial proclaims and shows the quality of the man.

2. Avraham Is Continually "Going"

Avraham Avinu passes all his tests with flying colors. He is always on the move. From his very first encounter with Hashem when he was told, "Go away from your land, from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the Land that I will show you"¹²⁹ to his continued "going" in the Land of Israel, as we are told that Avraham continued on his way, moving steadily toward the south.¹³⁰ Avraham was next commanded in the *Akeidah*, "Go on to Moriah region."¹³¹ He is in perpetual motion. He travelled from stop to stop, from level to level. Torah scholars have no respite either in this world or in the World to Come, as it says, "they will go from strength to strength."¹³² They are continually progressing in their spiritual strivings, struggling to ascend from a lower level to a higher one and then on to an even higher one.

3. Riding on the Donkey

Avraham Avinu rode on a donkey on his way to the *Akeidah*. Our Sages tell us in the Midrash that three great personalities are spoken of as riding on a donkey: Avraham,

¹²⁹ Bereshit 12:1.

¹³⁰ Bereshit 12:9.

¹³¹ Bereshit 22:2.

¹³² Berachot 64a interpreting Tehillim 84:8.

Moshe and the Messiah.¹³³ The significance of this "riding" is explained by the Maharal of Prague as mastering and overcoming the materialistic tendency in one's life.¹³⁴ Avraham was the first person who really overcame the materialistic bent and was fully oriented towards a spiritual perspective of life. The believers before him were only half-hearted. Noach "believed and did not believe,"¹³⁵ he did not take full control of the "donkey" but fell off it. Chanoch was a person who vacillated between righteousness and wickedness, so Hashem "took" him before he died of sin.¹³⁶ The first person to sit firmly in the saddle and to tame the "donkey" was Avraham Avinu. Several generations later, Moshe Rabbenu, as the leader of the Nation of Israel, "rode on the donkey." This mastery over the materialistic impulse was even greater because it was a national achievement since it was attained by their national leader. With the coming of the Messiah, we will reach final and total control over the materialistic impulse.

Bilam is the exact antithesis on this idea. He is dominated by physical passions and desires.¹³⁷ His greed is demonstrated by his innuendo that for his cursing services, he de-

¹³³ Yalkut Shimoni, Vayera 98; Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer 31.

¹³⁴ Gevurot Hashem, chap. 29. The Hebrew words for "donkey" and "materialism" have the same root: chet, mem, resh.

¹³⁵ See Rashi on Bereshit 7:7 in the name of the Midrash.

¹³⁶ Bereshit Rabbah 25:1 brought by Rashi on 5:22 and verse 24 by others (translator).

¹³⁷ See Pirkei Avot 5:19.

mands of Balak a fee of "a house full of gold and silver."¹³⁸ He does not ride on his donkey but in his depravity makes his donkey his night "companion."¹³⁹ He does not "ride on" and subdue his physical passions but is enslaved and corrupted by them. This is in stark contrast to Avraham Avinu. Human life is full of crises and tragedies and the key question is how does one tackle and respond to them. Does the crisis "ride on" him or does he "ride on" the crisis? The Ibn Ezra expresses this idea in a play on the Hebrew words for "she-ass" and "calamity."¹⁴⁰

4. The Circumcision and Binding of Yitzchak Trials

One of Avraham's tests was the command to circumcise himself and all his household including eight-day old babies. After the circumcisions, Hashem appeared to Avraham in the field of Mamre in order to visit the sick. Of Avraham's three friends, Aner, Eshkol and Mamre, Hashem appears to Avraham in the field of Mamre. Our Sages¹⁴¹ relate that Avraham consulted with these friends whether to perform the circumcision or not. Only Mamre advised him to go ahead and circumcise, which he indeed did. As a reward

¹³⁸ Bamidbar 22:18.

¹³⁹ Avodah Zarah 4b.

¹⁴⁰ The word for a "she-ass" when read according to the Ashkenazic pronunciation (with the taf as an "s" sound) is homonymous with the word for "calamity," i.e. both are pronounced "ason." Thus, there are those who ride on their "she-ass" (ason) and there are others whose "calamity" ("ason") ride on them.

¹⁴¹ Bereshit Rabbah 42:8.

Hashem appeared to Avraham specifically in the field of Mamre. The whole situation is rather puzzling. Did Avraham really vacillate about fulfilling G-d's command to circumcise?¹⁴² Furthermore, how is it that the advice of some guy finally convinced him? The Vilna Gaon¹⁴³ gives a deep insight in these questions. He explains that Avraham's *raison d'etre* was to redeem the world of its spiritual misery. He spread monotheism teaching mankind to desist from their barbaric and idolatrous ways and instead to serve G-d with refined morality and virtuous qualities. Now suddenly, Hashem commanded him to perform circumcisions. This was very disconcerting. How could he go ahead, take a knife, cut into himself and then take all of the babies of his household and mercilessly proceed to cut their flesh amid the screeching of these hapless infants? This would appear to be the height of immorality. Avraham was convinced that if he acted this way he would lose all of his influence over people. They would say that he had become as insane as the barbaric idolaters and thus they would refuse to accept any further spiritual guidance from him. True, Hashem had commanded him to circumcise himself in order to achieve personal perfection, but Avraham was willing to concede all this in order to be able to continue uplifting mankind out of its moral turpitude. He was willing to sacrifice his own soul

¹⁴² He had already performed for more demanding commands, including being willing to be burnt alive rather than worship idols (translator)!

¹⁴³ Literally means "The Genius of Vilna" is a term referring to Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna, also known as the Gra, who lived approximately 250 years ago.

for the sake of universal ideal. So Avraham went to ask his gentile friends if in fact he would lose their respect if he went ahead with the circumcisions. Eshkol and Aner advised him not to perform the circumcisions. However, Mamre, a true idealist, convinced Avraham not to violate the Divine command. Avraham also passed this test and circumcised himself and all of his household.

According to the above-mentioned explanation of the Vilna Gaon, the *Akeidah* constitutes a far harsher and more demanding trial. Avraham throughout his lifetime had tirelessly toiled to wean mankind away from its barbaric idolatry. In the name of Hashem, he had travelled around calling them to cease the madness of burning their children in their idolatrous "molech" worship. Now suddenly, G-d had commanded him to slaughter his own son. Perhaps people would be able to swallow circumcision since nothing serious had been done. But now he had been ordered to kill his son in the name of G-d. If he performed this act, it was absolutely evident that this "hypocritical preacher" would be utterly rejected and he would no longer have even the slightest spiritual influence on any of the non-Jews. These were the morbid thoughts that flashed through his mind on his way to Mt. Moriah. But Avraham Avinu even triumphed in this trial and proceeded to perform Hashem's will out of implicit faith in Him.

A trial is a struggle against opposing forces. The adversary is not always selfish, base and vulgar tendencies. Some-

times, as in our case, one has to overcome idealistic, spiritual and lofty aspirations which are nonetheless misguided. Avraham Avinu had shown that he was willing to sacrifice the ideals he believed in by performing the circumcisions. This reached a peek when he agreed to the virtual annihilation of the Jewish Nation who would have issued from his sacrificed son, Yitzchak, and to the resultant loss to the world of all the ideals that it was to bear. His love of Hashem and implicit obedience to His commands overcame his personal aspirations – material and even spiritual.

Question: Why should we care about the non-Jews and how our actions affect them?

Answer: Non-Jews are also created in the image of G-d and they also must believe in Hashem. Avraham's task is universal: to bring a Divine blessing to all of the nations of the world.¹⁴⁴ Our Sages' comment on the command, "And you must love Hashem, your G-d"¹⁴⁵ is that this also includes the obligation to act in such a way with other people that the Name of Heaven will become beloved through us. Furthermore, in the future the prophecy that "Out of Tzion will come Torah and the word of G-d from Yerushalayim"¹⁴⁶ will be fulfilled. The Nation of Israel is the heart of the nations,¹⁴⁷ and its task is to invigorate all the limbs connected to it. We

¹⁴⁴ Bereshit 12:3.

¹⁴⁵ Yoma 86a interrupting Devarim 6:5.

¹⁴⁶ Yeshayahu 2:3.

¹⁴⁷ Kuzari 2, 36-44.

aspire for the total elevation of the world including human beings and inanimate matter. Naturally, we will do things in stages, first refining the Nation of Israel and then uplifting all of mankind and so on down the ladder. But our unflinching objective is the elevation of all existence such that Hashem's presence will be apparent everywhere and in everything.

Haftarah for Parashat Lech Lecha

Yeshayahu Was One Yeshayahu Was One

[Yemenite Jews: Yeshayahu 40:25-41:17
Sefardim/Ashkenazim: Yeshayahu 40:27-41:16]

The fortieth chapter of Yeshayahu is considered by various streams of Biblical Criticism to be the beginning of "Second Yeshayahu" - as if there were two prophets with the same name! What is the reason behind this profane insistence on breaking up the words of our great prophet?

A pseudo-“question” which was asked by German “scientists” lies at the root of the problem: How is it possible that Yeshayahu, who lived during the generation of Uziyahu, Yotam, Achaz and Yechizkiyahu, the Kings of Yehudah (Yeshayahu 1:1), could describe the Nation of Israel’s return to Zion in the time of the Persian King, Koresh (ibid. 45), which occurred two hundred years later? Was he an extremely elderly man who lived for two hundred years? Clearly, these non-believing Tanach readers, called Biblical Critics, forgot something essential: Yeshayahu was a prophet. He could see great distances into the future be-

cause the Divine Presence rested upon him. He knew quite well how to project forward two hundred years.

But this is not the only problem that bothered these critics of one hundred years ago, whose combined ignorance and hatred of Israel caused them to go astray (as they did in relation to Yehoshua bin Nun - see the article on the Haftarah for Simchat Torah). They could not fathom how one man could have numerous and diverse facets. Since the prophet Yeshayahu praises peace, the proclaimed, he must be a leftist. But he legitimizes war, so he must be a rightist! Since he praises Shabbat, he must be religious. But he raises the banner of ethics and justice, so he must be a humanist. He recited Hallel for the Nation of Israel (what a disgusting nationalist!), and yet he is enthusiastic about all of humanity, so he is a universalist. Since he describes heavenly revelations, he must be a mystic. But he speaks so logically to us, so he is clearly rational. And so on and so on... Their conclusion: there is more than one Yeshayahu.

Let's abandon this fantastic idea. There was always only one Yeshayahu. He was a great man who was able to combine his incredible spirituality with a thorough understanding of the human psyche, in all of its manifestations. His ability to unify these diverse tendencies into one person is a capacity that transcends our world knowledge. How unlike this group of pseudo-scholars, enslaved by a dry theory and a weak understanding, who couldn't unify – who could only understand by breaking everything into pieces.

And they were further confounded by this “riddle”: how is it that the entire tone of Yeshayahu’s message begins to change at the famous fortieth chapter. What began as a message of strength, courage and determination turns into one of comfort, expectation and confident hope. This observation is in fact correct and astute...but it is nothing new! Our great Rabbi, the Rambam, already referred to chapter forty and its following chapters as the "Consolations of Yeshayahu." This does not mean that there were two separate Yeshayahus: the warrior and the comforter. It means that there was a monumental shift - an unparalleled tragedy - which occurred in the seam between the thirty-ninth chapter and the fortieth chapter, and which caused the message to change. What is this momentous event? The “failure” of the designated Messiah, King Chizkiyahu himself. Yeshayahu brings us this good news: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Yishai, and a branch will grow out of his roots. The spirit of Hashem will rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and awe of Hashem. His delight will be in the awe of Hashem. He will not judge after the sight of his eyes and he will not decide after the hearing of his ears...And righteousness will be the girdle of his loins and faithfulness the girdle of his reins" (Yeshayahu 11:1-5). This was the time of King Chizkiyahu, who had the potential to become the Messiah.

Our Sages relate that "The Holy One Blessed Be He wanted to make Chizkiyahu the Messiah" (Sanhedrin 44a). He was

a righteous, courageous and activist king. To our great distress, however, this messianic hope was hidden and, at the same time, the threatening clouds of Exile began to appear on the horizon.

It is now possible to understand the horrible despair that gripped the Nation of Israel at this time, and the transformation that took place in the style and content of Yeshayahu's prophecy.

He turned to his Nation with love and succinctly informed it: Do not despair, the Redemption has not been canceled, it has just been postponed. The Messiah will arrive at a later time. Be strong and courageous. "Why do you say, O Yaakov, and speak, O Israel: 'My way is hidden from Hashem, and my case has been passed over by my G-d'" (Yeshayahu 40:27). Are we eternally lost? Certainly not! "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Eternal G-d is Hashem, Creator of the ends of the earth, Who neither tires nor wearies. There is no scrutinizing His understanding. He gives strength to the tired, and He increases the strength of the powerless" (ibid. 28-29).

The Master of the Universe never reaches a point of exhausting His strength, and the more we cleave to Him, the stronger and more indefatigable we become. Even the youth, who are said to be full of energy, are sometimes broken after a difficult journey. "Youth may become tired and weary and young man may utterly fall" (30)...But those whose hope is in Hashem will have renewed strength, they

will grow wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not grow tired" (31). It is in this sense that we recite the blessing each morning: "Blessed is Hashem...who gives strength to the weary."

VAYERA

1. A Pair of Torah Portions about Avraham
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1. A Pair of Torah Portions on Avraham

There are two Torah portions about Avraham: the first gives the general principles and the second goes into detail. The first Torah portion, Lech Lecha, discusses Avraham's basic character as a person chosen by Hashem to serve as the core of the "mighty Nation."¹⁴⁸ This, the second portion, elaborates on examples where these characteristics were displayed.

¹⁴⁸ Bereshit 12:2.

2. Avraham Who Loves Mankind

Avraham is depicted as a man of immense kindness. He risked his life to save Lot, he hosted unknown guests and even tried to save Sedom from destruction. This is in contrast with Noach, who on being told by G-d that He was about to destroy the whole world, did not utter a single word of protest.¹⁴⁹ Even the episode of Sarah and Avimelech can be construed as an act of kindness on Avraham's part. When Sarah was abducted by Pharaoh, Avraham asked her to pose as his sister so that they would treat him well and through her efforts his life would be spared.¹⁵⁰ This time, however, this justification for the deception is absent, and Avraham simply announced that Sarah was his sister. This change by the Torah is obviously done to teach us something. Avraham's love for Sarah was in a sense fraternal, a pure and idealistic love that involved no feelings of jealousy or possessiveness which are so often present in a husband-wife relationship. Avraham Avinu had no selfish and petty reasons for keeping her for himself. She was thus theoretically free to go and become the wife of Avimelech is she so chose. This is obviously a legal and moral impossibility and Sarah did not entertain an even inkling of such a thought but it was possible from Avraham's point of view.¹⁵¹ Kindness stems from the ability to see the Divine light and

149 Zohar, part 1, p. 67b.

150 Bereshit 12:13.

151 See Talks by Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah on Parashat Vayera summarized by Rav Ilan Tor.

content that exists in every creation and thus Avraham, who saw the G-dly illumination in all creatures, loved them all.

3. Avraham Knows, Believes in and Loves Hashem

The accounts of Avraham given in the Torah depict him as a man of supreme kindness. The Rambam, in the wake of our Sages,¹⁵² highlights his intellectual quality as a personality who "knows his Creator."¹⁵³ But the Torah also describes him as a prime believer: "And he (Avram) believed in Hashem and He (G-d) considered this as righteousness."¹⁵⁴ Recognition and belief are related concepts, both define states of connection and association. To truly know something means to have integrated it into one's personality. Faith is also a means of knowing things. Faith encompasses intellectual perception and extends beyond it. The difference between them is that intellectual knowledge is always doubtful while faith is definite and certain. Science is doubtful and is in fact in continual flux because of the changes in our knowledge. This naturally is also the case in medicine. When we violate the Shabbat because doctors say it is a life threatening situation, it is not because we accept their opinion as certain, but because according to Halachah even a doubtful

¹⁵² Nedarim 32b.

¹⁵³ Rambam, Hilchot Yesodei Ha-Torah 9:4.

¹⁵⁴ Bereshit 15:6.

danger is reason enough to violate Torah laws.¹⁵⁵ Logical postulations and proofs are also dubious. Quite possibly counter arguments will be presented in the future which will completely refute views that are presently axiomatic. The very foundation of the scientific method is the fact that our knowledge is doubtful and tentative. Anything based on human knowledge is doubtful.

Faith, however, is entirely different. It is definite and certain. It harmoniously permeates the soul with calm tranquility. This undoubting conviction can be compared to a similar state of surety experienced in prophecy as described by the Rambam. It is obvious that if Avraham Avinu had felt even the slightest shadow of a doubt, concerning the authenticity of the *Akeidah* prophecy, he would not have been willing to sacrifice his son. He therefore must have been absolutely certain. It is true that at the initial stages of prophetic revelation things might be a bit hazy, as they were with Shmuel, when he did not realize that he was receiving a Divine call and thought at first that he was being called by Eli.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, regular prophecy is only clear about general principles but is incapable of giving clear and specific halachic directives. It is like seeing a mountain through a midst where the general outline can be seen but details of what is on the mountain are blurred. Thus a person who purports to have

¹⁵⁵ See Da'at Kohain, p. 260.

¹⁵⁶ The High Priest under whom he was serving as a trainee in the Mishkan (Sanctuary) at Shilo. Shmuel 1 3.

received prophetically, detailed laws from G-d is put to death because he is an imposter. The only exception is Moshe's halachic prophecy which is so powerful that it can delve into the finest details. This was achieved by Moshe Rabbenu as a prophet without having to resort to the legal derivations and analyses performed by Torah scholars.¹⁵⁷ To conclude, full *Emunah* - faith in and cleaving to Hashem - is something that is absolutely certain without a shadow of a doubt.

Avraham is described by the prophets as a man who loves G-d, "the seed of Avraham who loved Me."¹⁵⁸ Love and knowledge are interrelated. On occasion, despite repeated explanations, a person finds certain matters simply unintelligible. Then as he becomes emotionally connected to the issue, it clears up. Love leads to understanding. The reverse is also true – that recognition can lead to love as is said of Adam: "And Adam knew his wife Chava and she conceived and gave birth to Kayin."¹⁵⁹ It is clear that it is not referring to a superficial acquaintanceship but to a deep rooted understanding of each other which then led to intimate knowledge.

157 "Orot" by Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Kohain Kook, Zironim, chap. 2, "Chacham Adif Minavi," p. 120.

158 Yeshayahu 41:8 according to the standard commentators.

159 Bereshit 4:1.

4. Love of Mankind That Stems From Love of G-d

Avraham who knows, believes in and loves Hashem also loves all mankind, but it originates in his love of G-d. He did not discover Hashem by seeing the goodness and beauty of creation. The reverse is true, because he believed in G-d, he saw the various degrees of Divine sparks that appear at the different levels of creation. Everything started from an appreciation of the Creator.

Some people think that close scrutiny of nature can bring a person to faith in Hashem. They are so convinced of this that they study physics, biology, etc... even at the expense of Torah study. Observation of nature, before one recognizes Hashem, can lead to paganism and nature worship but not to faith in G-d. How can the observer be sure that spiritual experience he has is really a manifestation of the Creator, maybe he is simply overwhelmed by some limited aesthetic sensation or is in fact worshipping and deifying nature?

It is true that G-d also manifests Himself in nature and a spiritual experience can be felt through the splendor (Hebrew – *Hadar*) and beauty of the world as stated in the verse, "Prostrate yourself before Hashem in the splendor of holiness."¹⁶⁰ The Gemara¹⁶¹ cautions, however, that al-

¹⁶⁰ Tehillim 29:2.

¹⁶¹ Berachot 30b. This is on the basis of a Talmudic interpretative method called "*Al Tikri*" where further insights are derived from the verse by reading one

though an aesthetic experience can create an attachment to Hashem, this is not the regular and halachically normative way. The truly proper method to recognize G-d is via the Torah and Mitzvot. Once one has achieved faith through Jewish ideals and the Torah, he is able to perceive the Divine illumination in the whole of creation. He who already believes can be further stimulated to a deeper and stronger faith on seeing the Divine light that is manifested in the whole of nature.¹⁶² Avraham's all-embracing love for all of humanity emanated from his overpowering love of G-d, and on account of it he was able to discern the Divine sparks that existed even in the depths of the depravity and wickedness of Sedom. If the people of Sedom to be judged solely on human standards, they would inevitably be sentenced to total destruction because they were corrupting the whole of humankind.

Avraham's love for man, however, was not human, it resulted from his ability to see the Divine light everywhere even in the murkiest depths to which man could sink. Avraham thus sought some redeeming feature to save them, since they too were created in the image of G-d.

of the words as if it were another similar sounding word. Here "Splendor" ("*Hadrat*") is read as "awe" ("*Cherdat*").

¹⁶² A somewhat similar idea is brought by the Netziv of Volozhin in the name of Rav Hai Gaon in his discussion of "love of G-d" (in his commentary on Shir Ha-Shirim 3:1).

5. Avraham's Will Indicates G-d's Will

Avraham's discussion with Hashem over the inhabitants of Sedom was not a prayer or petition – it was a debate. He argued with Him saying it is inconceivable and sacrilegious that the judge of the entire universe should perform such an unjust act.¹⁶³ This debate in reality was a reflection of the deliberations on the fate of Sedom that were taking place in the Heavenly court.¹⁶⁴ Different Divine attributes, so to speak, were hammering out the issue and Avraham was like a radio receiver with a large antenna and received the heavenly broadcast. He then acted as the mouth piece for the quality of kindness. Because of his close affinity to, his love of and his faith in G-d, G-d revealed His own will through him, so that Avraham was in fact expressing Hashem's own inner will.

This is the reason that the righteous are able to decree and Hashem fulfills their desire¹⁶⁵ or, even a more extreme case, that G-d decrees and the righteous is able to cancel it.¹⁶⁶ All this does not mean, G-d forbid, that G-d wants one thing, while the righteous wants another and that Hashem changes His mind. No, there can be no inner change in the essence of G-d or of His will. Simply, the righteous person's will is

¹⁶³ Bereshit 18:25.

¹⁶⁴ Sha'arei Orah.

¹⁶⁵ See Shabbat 59b and Taanit 23a.

¹⁶⁶ Moed Katan 16a.

one aspect of G-d's will and he expresses vocally this particular point.

This is also the explanation why a curse pronounced by a Torah scholar, even if undeserved, is fulfilled.¹⁶⁷ The curse is really a Divine protest against a particular state of affairs and even though not all the conditions for its implementation apply, the protest stands. For example, when King David excavated the foundation of the Temple, the waters of the depth surged up and wanted to flood the world. King David thought of inscribing the Divine Name on a shard and casting it into the depths to quell the waters. There was, however, a halachic doubt: did the saving of the world justify the erasing of the Divine Name that would inevitably result from casting the shard into the depths? King David asked if anyone knew the answer, but no one replied. Only when King David threatened that anyone who knew the Halachah but did not speak up would be strangled, did Achitopel respond and say that it was permitted. Despite the fact that Achitopel revealed the answer in the end, King David's curse¹⁶⁸ clung to him and he died by strangulation.¹⁶⁹ This occurred because in essence Achitopel was a negative personality even though he did not act criminally on this occasion.

¹⁶⁷ Makkot 11a and elsewhere.

¹⁶⁸ Inspired by a spark of the Divine will.

¹⁶⁹ As described in Shmuel 2 17:23.

Avraham is a true righteous person whose will is a faithful reflection of the Divine will.

6. The Binding of Yitzchak (*Akeidah*): A Divine Command Versus Human Morality

The Divine command to sacrifice Yitzchak shattered the moral foundations of Avraham's life. He who had fought uncompromisingly against idolatry and human sacrifice, he who epitomized the loftiest morality and kindness was about to murder his own son! He was thus going to violate the most basic and logically obvious moral dictate that existed, "You shall not murder."

There are three crimes that are so heinous that according to the Halachah one must be willing to die rather than to transgress them. They are idolatry, immorality and murder. The abovementioned Halachah, regarding idolatry and severe immorality as derived from Torah verses. It was logically obvious. Even when threatened that unless you murder you will be killed, murder is forbidden. Who says that your blood is redder (= more important) than his!¹⁷⁰

And yet Avraham was on his way to murder his son! Avraham's "hypocritical" betrayal of the very ideals that he had preached to the world would destroy all his educational achievements. Past, present and future are about to be oblit-

¹⁷⁰ Sanhedrin 74a.

erated at one blow! These are the morbid thoughts that the evil inclination flashed through Avraham's mind to dissuade him from performing G-d's will.¹⁷¹

The *Akeidah* constitutes the dissolution of man-made morality and its replacement with a Divine command. Avraham had to forgo even his highest and loftiest ideals, thoughts and aspirations and substitute them with one single ideal, G-d's will. This is most a dramatic demonstration of the fact that we do not observe G-d's mitzvot because they are intelligible and pleasant but because they are the word of Hashem. We do not differentiate between the pleasant mitzvah of putting on Tefillin and the less enjoyable mitzvah of wiping out the memory of the Amalek. Both are equally dear to us. We refrain from eating pork not because it is loathsome to us but because thus we have been commanded by Hashem.¹⁷² We must obviously try to elevate ourselves to the level that we feel delight in performing the mitzvot and repugnance at the very thought of a sin. Furthermore, it is self-evident that enjoying prayer, disgust at eating pig and repugnance at the very thought of murder and similar emotions are proper and worthy feelings. Man advances and senses what is right and wrong. We must understand, however, that morality is not determined according to what man knows, feels or understands but it is based purely on the Divine word. The *Akeidah* came to uproot an

171 The Gra in Kol Eliyahu, Parashat Vayera sect. 12.

172 Sifra Kedoshim 20, also brought by Rashi on Vayikra 20:26.

ethical system which emanated from man, and to build in its place a firmly based Divine system of morality.

Naturally, Yitzchak was not sacrificed in the end. The *Akeidah* concludes with the verse, "Do not harm the boy. Do not do anything to him."¹⁷³ It could not finish any other way since murder is prohibited. What has been achieved is that the precept "You shall not murder" has been converted from a **humanly** based imperative that can vary and change according to human emotions and understanding to an eternal, immutable and **Divine** command. Once this understanding is firmly rooted, man is called to raise himself and to feel the pleasure and delight in performing G-d's absolute will.

¹⁷³ Bereshit 22:12.

Haftarah for Parashat Vayera

For or Against the King?

[Ashkenazim/Yemenite Jews: Melachim 2 4:1-37
Sefardim: Melachim 2 4:1-23]

It clear from one of the verses of our Haftarah that the prophet Elisha had an excellent relationship with Yehoram, King of Israel, even though the king was totally wicked. It is told that the great woman of Shunam hurried to serve the prophet and to provide him with "a little upper room with a wall" in which she placed "a bed, table, chair and lamp" (Melachim 2 4:10). Out of respect and gratitude, he asked her: "What is to be done for you? Should I speak to the king or the commander of the army for you?" (13). Here we see that the prophet had carte blanche to visit the Prime Minister and the Chief of the General Staff, since he suggested that he could act on the woman's behalf before them.

At face value, this fact is extremely surprising because we know, to our distress, that King Yehoram was a cruel and corrupt man. "And he (Yehoram) did evil in the eyes of Hashem...he held fast to the sins of Yerovam ben Nevat who caused Israel to sin. He did not depart from them"

(Melachim 2 3:2-3). It is impossible to find a more damning comparison than to Yerovam.

We would expect that the great prophet, who was responsible for the spiritual purity of the Nation of Israel, would diametrically oppose the King, and not have positive relationship with him - even for the purpose of helping others. We would expect Elisha to sever all contact with him and devote himself to the pure needs of the entire Nation.

But this is not so, and we should pay close attention to the prophet Elisha, a man obedient to the national government, even though he was a great zealot following the example of his teacher, the prophet Eliyahu. When Yehoram, King of Israel, went to war together with Yehoshafat, King of Yehudah, against a shared enemy, he turned to Elisha in a moment of despair. Elisha showed no mercy or love toward the king, admonishing him instead: "What do I have to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and the prophet of your mother...If it were not for the presence of Yehoshafat, King of Yehudah, I would not look towards you nor see you" (ibid. 3 13:14), since Yehoshafat was a righteous king. The prophet Elisha did not fear rebuking the king of Israel with great forcefulness.

Furthermore, the prophet knew that the king saw him as a dangerous enemy who should be killed – he had already sent an assassin from the secret police to eliminate him: "But Elisha sat in his house and the elders sat with him, and the king sent a man from before him; but before the messenger

came to Elisha, he said to the elders: 'Do you see how this son of a murderer has sent someone to remove my head. Look, when the messenger comes, shut the door and push him at the door. Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?'" (ibid. 6:32). Yehoram learned this tactic from his father, the corrupt King Achav, who sent special agents throughout all of Israel and the surrounding states in order to find the prophet Eliyahu and kill him.

Knowing all of this, how can we understand what united Elisha and Yehoram, who were so vastly different from one another? The answer is simple: shared, infinite love for the Nation of Israel. Even if the king of Israel was an evil man, he still remained the king of Israel, and carried the incredible responsibility of saving the Nation. And while it is not the ideal situation, it is certainly preferable for the Nation to be ruled by the sinful government of Yehoram than to fall into the hand of the enemy and to suffer the decree of exile.

The prophet was therefore always ready to help the king for the benefit of the Nation of Israel, and the king, despite his ambivalence, could not refrain from expressing his gratitude to some extent.

When Yehoram was about to make a severe strategic error, the prophet Elisha warned him: "Beware that you not pass such a place, for Aram is hidden there" (ibid. verse 9). With this piece of advice Elisha saved the army of Israel, who went on to be victorious. Elisha followed precisely the path of his teacher, Eliyahu, who did not hold back even the

harshest rebuke when it was justified (Melachim 1 18:17-18), but also honored this same king of Israel when he displayed self-sacrifice to protect his Nation and the Land. "And the hand of Hashem was upon Eliyahu, so he girded his loins and ran before Achav until the approach of Yizre'el" (ibid. verse 46). Running from Mt. Carmel to Yizre'el valley! Is it possible to display greater honor for the king?

Achav was internally conflicted. On the one hand, he was influenced by his evil, non-Jewish wife, Izevel, daughter of the King of Sidon. On the other hand, he was influenced by the prophet Eliyahu. If the prophet were to abandon him, he would have fallen completely under the dominion of his wife - to the great detriment of the Nation of Israel. The influence of the prophet indeed secretly bore fruit. At the moment of truth, the king turned to him for advice and called him "my father" (Melachim 2 6:21). Furthermore, during the national tragedy, Ahav was truly torn apart because of his pain; he ripped his garment, and while he was walking on the wall, "and the people looked, and he had sackcloth within on his flesh" (ibid. verse 30).

The heretic, the sinner, the anti-religious one was, somewhere within, a secretly repentant man, who wore sackcloth of mourning on his flesh.

CHAYE SARAH

1. The Buying of a Burial Plot
2. "Me'arat Ha-Machpelah" (The Double Cave)
3. The Significance of the Discussions of our Forefathers' Servants

1. The Buying of a Burial Plot

The beginning of this Torah portion relates how Avraham bought a burial plot for his wife, Sarah. The Ibn Ezra note "that this event is related to inform us of the inestimable value of the Land of Israel for the living and even for the dead. It is also mentioned to show that G-d had fulfilled His promise to Avraham that he and his offspring would own this Land."¹⁷⁴ With this purchase we began to actually fulfill the mitzvah of settling in Israel by setting down firm roots in the Land. It is true that this was not a living connection but a burial, but the buried literally merge with the soil of the Land of Israel and become part of it.

¹⁷⁴ Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra, a famous medieval Torah commentator, makes this comment on Bereshit 23:19.

2. "Me'arat Ha-Machpelah" (The Double Cave)

Avraham initially simply asked for a burial site for Sarah.¹⁷⁵ The Hittites willingly complied offering any grave that he desired.¹⁷⁶ Avraham then launched his sudden bid specifically for the Cave of Machpelah. A prolonged bargaining process ensues which concludes with the sale of the cave to Avraham. The Torah then states twice that the cave was "raised up" to Avraham as a burial site,¹⁷⁷ which our Sages explain to mean that it rose in importance by its transfer from a commoner (Efron) to the possession of a king (Avraham).¹⁷⁸

Why does the Torah focus so much attention on the sale of Me'arat Ha-Machpelah which on the face of it was a simple commercial transaction? Both Avraham and the Hittites knew that the progenitors of all mankind, Adam and Chavah were buried in the cave.¹⁷⁹ To be buried in this cave meant that you are their successors. In Avraham's eulogy for Sarah he explains her essence and shows that she is the direct spiritual descendant of the mother of all humanity (Chavah). She is not just "Sarai" – my Sarah – but Sarah, the princess of the entire world.¹⁸⁰ She was Chavah's sequel

¹⁷⁵ Bereshit 23:4.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. verse 6.

¹⁷⁷ All of these events are described in Bereshit 23:5-20.

¹⁷⁸ Bereshit Rabbah 58:8 quoted by Rashi on Bereshit 23:20.

¹⁷⁹ Eruvin 53.

¹⁸⁰ Rashi on Bereshit 17:15 explains the change of name based of their different meanings as brought here.

and rectified her error. Chavah had brought death into the world by misleading her husband and convincing him to listen to her. Sarah corrected this and thus Hashem instructed Avraham: "Whatever Sarah, your wife, tells you to do, listen!"¹⁸¹ This was said in response to Avraham's doubts when Sarah demanded: "Expel this maidservant and her son."¹⁸² At first, Avraham had serious reservations since in the past mankind had already suffered greatly when a husband was misguided by his wife. Hashem therefore gave Avraham the above-mentioned reassurance. In contrast to Chavah, who had been cursed that "you shall give birth in pain,"¹⁸³ birth for Sarah became a joyful event of miraculous youthful rejuvenation.¹⁸⁴

Avraham similarly continued the task of Adam in the world. There were ten generations between Adam and Noach, when the deluge wiped out humanity. The ten generation between Noach and Avraham were saved by virtue of Avraham who was destined to descend from them. He was the purpose and the *raison d'etre* of all these generations. Until then there was no meaning to the world. Avraham's appearance on the scene imbues the existence of the world with significance. Our Sages express this idea in their interpretation of the verse: "And these are the events of the of heaven and earth '*behibara'am*' (when they were cre-

181 Bereshit 21:12.

182 Bereshit 21:10. This was said to reference to Hagar and her son Yishmael.

183 Bereshit 3:16.

184 Bereshit 18:12: "After I am worn out I shall renew my menstruations."

ated).¹⁸⁵ Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korchah says: "The (Hebrew) letters of '*behibara'am*' are the same as '*be-Avraham*,' indicating that the world was created for the sake of Avraham."¹⁸⁶ Avraham and Israel are here to salvage the world from the state of crisis that Adam had created by his sin. Their purpose is to return the world to the spiritual status that existed in the Garden of Eden. Only Israel still retains a spark of the brilliance that shone from Adam's countenance, and their task is to return it to the rest of the world.

The sons of Chet who Avraham addresses were not simply ordinary people. They were important people. Firstly, they lived in the Land of Israel which shows that in same way they were connected to Israel. Archeological finds and historical records indicate that they had a highly developed civilization. They posed themselves as an alternative to Avraham and the "culture" that he was spreading. They apparently understood why he was set on acquiring Me'arat Ha-Machepaleh as a burial site. It was no longer a generous and friendly discussion, but became very difficult bargaining. Behind the scenes there was a hard-hitting debate about who was the real successor to Adam.

The desire to be buried together with ones forefathers shows that one identifies with them and wants to walk in their footsteps. From several sources we learn that it is a significant where and with whom a person is buried. All of the kings

¹⁸⁵ Bereshit 2:4.

¹⁸⁶ Bereshit Rabba 19:6.

made a point of being buried in their family regal burial site.¹⁸⁷ Similarly, when Shevna reckoned that the Nation would side with him against the ruling king, Chizkiyahu, he went and conspicuously dug himself a burial site at the kingly site which demonstrated his intent to seize the kingship.¹⁸⁸ It is so important to be buried in one's ancestral burial site that it is permissible to re-bury a person for that purpose even though relocating a dead body is usually forbidden because it is disrespectful to the deceased.¹⁸⁹ Even in the burial of executed criminals, the worse of criminals who are given the more severe form of execution are buried separately from lesser criminals.¹⁹⁰ There is also an important custom to pray at the gravesites of the righteous.

It is clear from all of these cases that by connecting to a person's grave, one is linked to the person, to his spirit and to his soul.¹⁹¹ The grave is a person's last contact with this earthly world and his soul still has some faint lines of attachment to it after his death. The soul comes "to visit" the body and the spirits of the deceased and of the visitors to his gravesite meet and connect there. This is why Avraham made such an effort to be attached to the burial site of Adam and Chavah. He knew that he and Sarah were the "founding fathers" of mankind and they should thus be bur-

¹⁸⁷ Divrei Ha-Yamim 2 21:20, 24:25.

¹⁸⁸ Sanhedrin 26a.

¹⁸⁹ Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 363.

¹⁹⁰ Mishnah Sanhedrin 6:5.

¹⁹¹ See Sotah 34b.

ied in their "family" tomb together with the originators of humanity.

3. The Significance of the Discussions of our Forefathers' Servants

The third topic dealt with in this Torah portion is Eliezer's mission to find a suitable wife for Yitzchak. The Torah relates the event at great length, devoting about seventy verses to it. It is in fact repeated twice – one when the Torah describes the events and once when Eliezer recounts the story to Rivkah's family. Furthermore, Eliezer was adamant to tell the whole tale as he said: "I will not eat until I speak my piece."¹⁹² There is a prolific amount of "speaking" going on here. Ostensibly, this subject is not of such sublime importance that it justifies all the time and space assigned to it. On the face of it, there are far more important topics, such as the laws of Shabbat which fill entire volumes of Halachah books and yet only a sparing few verses were devoted to them in the Torah itself.¹⁹³ We must conclude that Eliezer's discussion is in fact a very important matter as our Rabbi tells us: "The discussions of our forefather's servants are more pleasing to G-d than even the Torah study of the sons. This is shown by the fact that Eliezer's narrative is repeated

¹⁹² Bereshit 24:33.

¹⁹³ Such as the prohibition of lighting fires (Shemot 35:3) and of carrying from a public domain to a private domain and vice versa (Shemot 16:29).

twice while many important halachic principles were given only by remote indications in the Torah."¹⁹⁴

Spiritual elevation can be achieved in one of two ways – by the study of spiritual ideas or by spiritual experience. The first path is a process of intellectual study and analysis while the second is a form of spiritual influence emanating from an inner vision and experience. Our prophets of old did not attempt to explain or convince people by logical proofs but rather they express these inner truths through themselves and people that met them were influenced and inspired by the very spiritual experience of contact with the personality of the prophet (The period of the prophets was the same time that the philosophers flourished in Greece. For example, Yirmiyahu lived at the time of Pythagoras. The Greek philosophers employed rational explanation while the prophets used the alternative method of influence).

The prophets did not stress the importance of Torah study. Naturally, they themselves were outstanding Torah scholars,¹⁹⁵ but this is not mentioned in the Tanach because life and study were not separate disciplines for the prophets.

194 Rashi on Bereshit 24:42 quoting Bereshit Rabbah 60:8.

195 They were the transmitters of the Oral Torah and headed the Rabbinic courts as the Rambam says, "Eliyahu and his court," "Yeshayahu and his court, etc..." (The beginning of the Rambam's introduction to the Mishneh Torah). See also *Pikrei Avot* (1:1): And the Elders transmitted (the Oral Torah) to the Prophets." And the Rambam in his introduction to the Mishnah (chap. 3, p. 28, Rambam La'am of Mossad Ha-Rav Kook) stresses that the prophets were involved in in-depth legal analysis and derivation.

Our prophets were not like us. Today we live in a dichotomous state in which we devote part of our time to Torah study and spend the rest of our time "living our lives." For them, all of their lives were Torah. Even when they were involved in mundane matters, their whole approach emanated from the depth of their personality which was entirely Torah. The experience of an encounter with such a "personality of Torah," even when it involved only secular matters, made for more of an impact than an analytical study of a thousand books. One should learn even from the mundane discussions of Torah scholars which are sometimes even more effective than the study of the whole Torah.

The ideal of Torah study is not stressed in the Tanach, but this is not because it is unimportant. The leading personalities obviously learned day and night but their studies were not an isolated aspect of their lives but a most natural part their existence – life itself. The deep rooted connection to the Torah, which is manifested today by its study, was revealed in every action and word spoken in those times.

Yehoshua had to be specially charged to "meditate on it [the Torah] day and night"¹⁹⁶ since he was on the verge of the conquest of Israel during which he would be fully occupied in his task as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, planning and executing military operations. Under the circumstance, there was a need to emphasize the obligation of Torah study despite his heavy national burden. In ordinary

196 Yehoshua 1:8.

times, however, it is taken for granted that one must always to be attached to the Torah.

A Jew is summoned to rise to the level of the "servants of our forefathers" who manifested the Torah not only in their studies, but even in their mundane conversations.

Haftarah for Parashat Chayei Sarah

A King in Perplexity

[Melachim 1 1:1-31]

"And King David was elderly, advanced in years, and they covered him with clothes, but he could not become warm" (Melachim 1 1:1). Amazing! Was this a king's palace or an elderly home in such poor financial state that the heating system was not working properly? Did King David reach a state of senility so that it was necessary to cover him? Wasn't he able to dress himself? The words of his servants which follow are even more startling: "Let a young virgin be sought for my master the king, and let her stand before the king and be his attendant, and let her lie on his chest so that my master the king becomes warm" (ibid. 2). What a strange way to warm a holy king, whose life was filled with trials, and who climbed to the highest spiritual peaks. As the Psalms of David testify, his was an incomparable soul burning for Hashem.

A parallel historical document tells us about the tireless efforts of this honored king, at precisely the same time in his life. "When David was elderly and full of days, he made his

son Shlomo king over Israel" (Divrei Hayamim 1 23:1). It is extremely wise to be concerned about appointing one's successor. "David provided abundant materials before his death. He called for Shlomo, his son, and charged him to build a house for Hashem, G-d of Israel" (ibid. 22:5-6). These were not only political but also spiritual preparations: he gave the plans of the Temple to his son (ibid. 28:11), and arranged a list of tens of thousands of Levi'im, designating each of them for specific roles (chapters 23-27). What is happening here? What exactly is the mental state of our holy King David?

Rashi, our great commentator, revealed the answer to this riddle through the words of our Sages (Pirkei De-Rebbe Eliezer, chapter 43): "When David saw the angel standing in Jerusalem with a sword in his hand, his blood chilled from fear" (Rashi to Melachim 1 1:1). There is no issue of senility here – there is only a question of inner spiritual concern. What led to the incident of the angel with the sword? The Tanach relates that King David instructed Yoav, the commander of the army, to take a census. Yoav tried to convince him that it was not necessary, and was in fact improper, "And Hashem, your G-d, will add many more to this Nation, a hundredfold, and the eyes of the king see. Why then does my master the king desire this thing?" (Shmuel 2 24:3). But the king gave in to his evil inclination and held fast to his command. Yoav, as the commander of the army, obeyed and conducted the census. "And there were eight hundred thousand soldiers who drew the sword in Israel and

five hundred thousand men of Yehudah" (ibid. 9). Blessed is Hashem, this is a good-standing army, but "David's heart was struck after he had counted the people. And David said to Hashem: I have sinned greatly in what I have done" (10). What was this fateful sin? If this census had been necessary for a military purpose, it would have been permissible according to the Halachah. But since the military did not see a need for it, it was clearly motivated by absent-minded militarism. One must recognize the great merit of King David in establishing for us an army worth its name, and the fact that he transformed a tortured Nation into a great power, but "a man does not live by bread alone" and also not by an infantry alone. There was a misplaced sense of priorities here which was dangerous. "And Hashem sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning until the appointed time, and seventy thousand men died from Dan to Beersheva. When the angel stretched his hand over Jerusalem to destroy it, Hashem relented of the evil, and said to the angel who destroyed the people: Hold back your hand...and David said to Hashem when he saw the angel striking the Nation and said:" Behold, I have sinned and I have transgressed, but what have these sheep done?" (ibid. 15-17). And then, as our Sages graphically describe, the angel took his avenging sword, dripping with blood, and wiped it on David's clothing. This act caused him to be plagued by trembling for the rest of his life (Pirkei De-Rebbe Eliezer, chapter 43). This explains why the king was distressed and immobilized.

At the end of his life, David completed all of his great activ-

ities: independence, a military, conquests, a strong national economy – almost everything that makes a strong nation. But it was still lacking a soul! When the members of the court, which included some fools, saw their king worried and bothered, they concluded that he was simply cold, and if he married an amicable and exciting young woman, he would be revived. As is related in the Tanach, King David did not even bother to respond to them. He floated high above these small politicians. Nonetheless, he agreed that the young woman would serve the role of a new secretary - but nothing more: "And the young woman was very fair and she attended the king and served him, but the king had no intimacy with her" (Melachim 1 1:4). Our Sages also reveal to us that this young woman much later became one of King Shlomo's wives (Sanhedrin 22a).

In any event, King David had concerns on a completely different level, and he dedicated his final days to activities important beyond measure, particularly to filling the Nation's spiritual hole: choosing a successor, preparing for the building of the Temple, organizing the Levi'im, the law enforcers and the judges (Divrei Hayamim 1 23:4). And, of course, delivering his great spiritual message to the Nation, in a major speech to "all of the princes of Israel, the princes of the tribes, the captains of the companies who served the king by divisions, the captains over the thousands, the captains over the hundreds, the stewards over all of the property...and with the officers, the mighty men and with all of the mighty soldiers..." (ibid. 28:1). The great king, rich

with life experience of closeness to Hashem, made a declaration which can be heard to this very day: "Observe and seek out all the commandments of Hashem, your G-d, so that you may possess this good Land and leave it as an inheritance to your children after you for eternity" (8).

He then turned to the entire assembly (ibid. 29:10) in order to bless Hashem and strengthen the faith of the Nation. This is the section which we recite each morning in our prayers while standing, and with proper intention. It begins: "And David blessed Hashem in front of the entire assembly."

TOLDOT

1. Yitzchak Our Forefather
2. The Conflict Between Yaakov and Eisav
3. The Inner Characters of Yaakov and Eisav
4. The Birthright in Exchange for Lentils
5. The Blessing of the Material World was Given to Eisav
6. Esav the Wicked
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8. Yaakov's Spiritual Blessing

1. Yitzchak Our Forefather

"And these are the descendent of Yitzchak son of Avraham, Avraham was Yitzchak's father."¹⁹⁷ The repetition comes to stress that Yitzchak continued the task and ideology of Avraham. His personality, however, was quite different from that of his father. Yitzchak considered going down to Egypt during a famine just as Avraham had done during a previous one. He was commanded by G-d: "Do not descend to Egypt but dwell in this Land."¹⁹⁸ "You are a perfect

¹⁹⁷ Bereshit 25:19.

¹⁹⁸ Bereshit 26:2.

burnt-offering, and residence outside of the Holy Land is unbecoming of you."¹⁹⁹ He is the very embodiment of self-sacrifice, passively serving the will of G-d as evidenced in his willingness to serve as an offering in the *Akeidah*. He was unlike Avraham who was the pinnacle of spiritual and material activism in his recognition of G-d, in his spreading the faith in Hashem, in his digging of wells, as a wealthy farmer, as a warrior, etc... In contrast, Yitzchak was completely passive, subduing his will to that of the Divine. He is altogether "within" and connected to the Land of Israel, and any exit to outside of the Land is therefore inconceivable. Avraham was born outside Israel. Yaakov descended and passed away outside Israel, but Yitzchak was born, lived and remained only in the Land of Israel. Avraham was a manifestly righteous person but Yitzchak was a hidden *tzaddik* - righteous person - whose inner strength did not need to be exposed.

2. The Conflict Between Yaakov and Eisav

Yitzchak had two sons, Yaaokv and Esav. The conflict already began during pregnancy as it says, "And the children clashed within her."²⁰⁰ It continued at birth when Yaakov attempted to subdue Esav, as it is written, "and with his

199 Rashi to *ibid.* in the name of *Bereshit Rabbah* 64:3.

200 *Bereshit* 25:22.

[Yaakov's] hand he grasped Esav's heel."²⁰¹ Rivkah realized that something was abnormal. "She went to inquire of G-d."²⁰² The Divine answer revealed that the rivalry should not be viewed as a personal clash which can be treated by "group therapy" and the like, but that it is an all-compassing "world war" between two contrasting ideologies to decide which of them would rule the world. Two nations struggled to decide which would determine the character of the world, nay, the very face of two world was at stake. "Two nations are in your womb, two regimes will separate from within you, and control will pass back and forth between them."²⁰³ The conflict was over "the inheritance of two worlds," i.e. this natural world and the spiritual, World to Come. Neither was willing to compromise – take one and leave the other world for the competitor. The issue at stake was would the spirit rule the course of history or would matter determine the course of events.

"Whenever she passed by the doors of the Torah schools of Shem and Ever, Yaakov convulsed in an effort to get out, but whenever she passed by a pagan temple of idolatry Esav convulsed to get out."²⁰⁴ Idolatry leads to the justification of unlimited gratification of man's basest and most despicable instincts, including lust and murder. But surely man is a thinking and spiritual being! So idolatry comes along and

201 Bereshit 25:26.

202 Bereshit 25:22.

203 Bereshit 25:23.

204 Rashi in the name of the midrash on Bereshit 25:22.

supplies the ideological license for satisfying all these contemptible bodily passions, thus enslaving the spirit to matter. Our Rabbis state, "Israel knew that idolatry had no real substance but they engaged in it in order to permit their incestuous lusts,"²⁰⁵ and thus gave a "philosophical" rationale for their depravity. In contrast, the true and holy philosophy of life is that the body must be subordinate to the spirit and that man's higher elements should rule and direct all his physical activities.

3. The Inner Characters of Yaakov and Eisav

As the young men grew up, their different roles became apparent. "And Esav became a man knowledgeable in hunting, a man of the field, while Yaakov was a righteous man who remained in the tents."²⁰⁶ Esav was not simply a "trained hunter" but he was a "man of hunting." His very essence was to be a man of the field, a man who courageously confronts wild animals and all the threats of this world. Yaakov's character, however, was scholarliness and homeliness. It is quite possible that he knew how to hunt but this was not intrinsic to his nature, which was to be a "dweller of tents," learning Torah and involved in spiritual matters. Esav's task was more difficult.²⁰⁷ It is not a "big deal" sanctifying Hashem's

²⁰⁵ Sanhedrin 63b.

²⁰⁶ Bereshit 25:27.

²⁰⁷ It is explained in section 6 that these positive aspects of Esav's personality will only be realized at the End of Days.

Name in the yeshivah where there are few tests and temptations. To grapple with the difficult problems of this world and to overcome them, however, is a true *Kiddush Hashem* – sanctification of Hashem's Name (The Rabbinic midrash describing Esav's kicking to leave his mother's womb as he passed by sites of idolatry is explained by a Chasidic interpretation as an attempt to sanctify Hashem's Name at the heart of idolatrous activities). Esav was a courageous fighter who knew how to hunt and combat wild animals and subdue them. Our forefather Yitzchak respected and encouraged this valor as it says, "And Yitzchak loved Esav – Rivkah, however, loved Yaakov."²⁰⁸

4. The Birthright in Exchange for Lentils

In general, the firstborn is the most prominent of the children and leads the ways. Since he is the oldest of the children, he has the responsibility to help raise them, and he thus psychologically develops a sense of moral duty towards them (This is the reason why the Gemara²⁰⁹ states "that if a daughter [is born] first it is a good sign for the children," as she helps her parents in the rearing and education of the other children). We witnessed the striking of the firstborn in Egypt because they were morally responsible for the cruelty. With the Nation of Israel, the task of serving Hashem origi-

²⁰⁸ Bereshit 25:28.

²⁰⁹ Baba Batra 141a.

nally belonged to the firstborn until it was transferred to the Tribe of Levi. It is thus evident that spiritual education is the task of the firstborn while the remaining children are involved in improving the material lot.

Yet with Yaakov and Esav things were upside down. Esav the firstborn, who was supposed to be the spiritual leader, was "a man knowledgeable in hunting and a man of the field" who dealt with the food, income and material matters. But Yaakov, the younger brother, who should have been dealing with the mundane, earthly matters, was a "dweller of tents," a spiritual personality. Something was wrong, everything was reversed!

The tragic day of Avraham's demise arrived.²¹⁰ Who was to be his successor? Yaakov was involved in "cooking a stew."²¹¹ This was his pre-ordained task; to deal with the food and all the material needs. It did not matter to the "spiritual" firstborn, who just "came in from the field,"²¹² whether grandpa was alive or dead. He arrived exhausted and asked Yaakov for food. Rather strange! Was this the only food at home? And if he was tired, why did he need to eat? Esav's tiredness was not physical but emotional. He was exhausted because of the five sins that he had perpetrated that day.²¹³

²¹⁰ Rashi on Bereshit 25:30.

²¹¹ Bereshit 25:29.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ He had killed Nimrod. He had performed illicit relations with a married woman. He denied the principle of the Resurrection of the Dead. He denied the existence of G-d. He ridiculed the birthright (Baba Batra 16b).

Esav had no interest in bettering the world, his only concern was his bodily desires – "eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we will die." Yaakov offered to switch tasks; you supervise the food and I'll take the birthright with its spiritual responsibility. Esav jumped at the opportunity. He had inquired of and been previously told by Yaakov what the birthright involved. He gladly relinquished his "right" to the death penalty for serving G-d while drunk and to continually trim his hair in a contrite and modest way was worse than death for Esav; it was contrary to his whole nature. Long hair is a sign of unruliness and lack of discipline, which perfectly befitted Esav, that ungovernable and stormy hunter of the wilds. The birthright was definitely not for him.

Question: Why then is the *nazir*²¹⁴ commanded to allow his hair to grow untouched?

Answer: The *nazir* is an exception which cannot be used as a model. A *nazir* can be at either extreme – he can be a holy person or a sinner.²¹⁵ There is a well-known case when a young *nazir* with beautiful hair came from the south Rabbi Shimon Ha-Tzadik the High Priest. On one occasion he had seen his reflection in a watch well, was overwhelmed by the beauty of his locks and was tempted to act promiscuously.

²¹⁴ A *nazir* (pl. *nazirim*) is a place who takes upon himself a vow of abstinence from grape products, hair cutting and ritual impurity through proximity to corpses (translator).

²¹⁵ A *nazir* can accept the vows of abstinence in a fit of despair and anger or out of sincere righteousness. See Ta'anit 11a (translator).

But his better nature took control and he took the nazirite vows which involved the eventual shaving off of all his hair.²¹⁶ Rabbi Shimon kissed him on the head and said, "May there be many *nazarim* like you (who vow out of righteous motives) in Israel." This was the only occasion that Rabbi Shimon was convinced that the *nazir* had vowed out of absolutely pure motives. The *nazir* is thus an exception either for the better or worse.

So the barter was done in which Esav sold the birthright to Yaakov in exchange for bread and a lentil stew. Esav's contempt for the birthright became obvious here as he "ate, drank, arose and went spurning the birthright."²¹⁷ All he wanted was to eat and drink, he rejected the birthright. Yaakov's acquisition of the birthright was therefore not unfair extortion under pressure, exploiting Esav's momentary weakness, but, on the contrary, it was a reflection of the true Esav. Now the roles have been reversed, and thus lead that each person to his true basic task. Yaakov was in fact the firstborn since he was conceived from the first drop of semen. This original fact only became evident after the reversal amendment. The primary Divine plan had formally been implemented with Yaakov coordinating the spiritual side of the world and Esav controlling the physical development of the world.

²¹⁶ On conclusion of the nazirite period (a minimum of thirty days), among other things, he shaves his whole head (translator).

²¹⁷ Bereshit 25:34.

5. The Blessing of the Material World was Given to Eisav

In his old age, Yitzchak decided to give an appropriate fatherly blessing to each of his sons respectively. He knew full well that Esav's task was to supervise the development of the material world. It thus never occurred to Yitzchak to give Esav the spiritual blessing. On the contrary, he wanted to bless him to succeed in his sphere. Esav was strong and courageous. People like this who are capable of overcoming major obstacles are needed for the building of the world. But Yitzchak wanted to bless him that his talents be used constructively and not, G-d forbid, in the destruction of the world. Yitzchak called his "older" son (he did not call him his "firstborn") and requested that he hunt for food and prepare a tasty dish. The blessing was for success in material matters and it was therefore most appropriate that it be accompanied with "food" which symbolizes the physical world.

Question: Why did the dish have to be a delicacy?

Answer: Because all aspects of life should be pleasant gentle and satisfying. There is no reason for us to suffer in this world.

Yitzchak did not suffice with a general request but detailed his instructions: "Now please sharpen your weapons – your sword and your bow – and go out to the field and hunt game for me."²¹⁸ Was Yitzchak giving Esav hunting lessons?

²¹⁸ Bereshit 27:3.

No! Rashi explains that "Please sharpen" means to sharpen the ritual slaughtering (*shechitah*) knife so that the animal is killed in a ritually fit manner and you do not feed me non-kosher food. Further, Rashi explains "and hunt for me" – take wild, ownerless animals and do not steal animals. Yitzchak taught Esav that he must run the world in a proper and upright fashion both vis-à-vis G-d (kosher killing) and vis-à-vis other human beings (no theft). To make the world simply run properly, without any moral considerations, can easily be achieved by any dictator. We, however, most decidedly want the world not only to function but to do so morally and decently. We have no excessive demands of those who are involved in economic activities. For example, a farmer is not expected to be a Rosh Yeshiva, but he must be a decent human being – moral and upright.

None of this interested Esav. He was intent on bringing back food by hook or by crook. The verse states, "And Esav went to the field to hunt game and to bring it."²¹⁹ The words "to bring it" appear to be superfluous, and so they are explained to mean that if he could not find wild animals he would "bring" even from stolen animals. Esav was not fussy, the means did not matter, the main thing was to achieve the desired result. Europe, Esav's spiritual successor, followed suit. They built the world technologically but utterly devastated it morally

219 Bereshit 27:5 and Rashi there in the name of the Midrash.

6. Esav the Wicked

Yitzchak believed in Esav in his ability to manage the material world morally and thus wanted to give him his blessing. Rivkah, however, knew the stark truth. Esav in his present state was not capable of advancing the world, since he himself for the moment was incorrigibly depraved. Hopefully after several thousand years of improvement when the End of Days arrives, he would eventually be fit for the task. He possessed strength but it was the strength of wickedness which would be used for the destruction of the world. Yitzchak saw the overall picture of the ideal and absolute truth in which Esav's strength must and will be employed at the End of Days for the world's benefit. Rivkah, however, saw the world in its realistic, present state where Esav was a source of evil. At present he is a murderer as he said, "May the days of the mourning of my father come soon so that then I will be able to kill my brother."²²⁰ It is true that he was upset because his blessing was taken from him but there are limits even to an angry response. He even wanted to hasten the death of his father. It was a bit too much for him to do that personally, so he requested it of his dear uncle Yishmael, who certainly would willingly comply.²²¹ These murderous inclinations were not created overnight because of a one-time event but are indications of his deep-rooted corrupt nature.²²² Rivkah

220 Bereshit 27:41.

221 Midrash Ha-Gadol, Bereshit 28:9.

222 Rav Charlop in Ma'ayanei Ha-Yeshu'a.

knew Esav's present state better and thus decided that in the meantime Yaakov would have to fulfill both his and Esav's tasks (Sarah had acted similarly a generation earlier when she decided to banish Yishmael from the home because of the negative influence of his corrupt behavior. Avraham was shocked. This went against the grain, which was the ideal of absolute kindness. It is true but it was essential for practical considerations. Hashem confirmed Sarah's approach: "Do everything that Sarah tells you."²²³ They should ideally live together but it was not possible at the present time. "The events that occurred to our forefathers are indications of what will befall their descendants!"²²⁴)

7. The Transfer of Eisav's Blessing to Yaakov

Rivkah instructed Yaakov, "Now, my son, listen to me and to what I command you. Go...take...and bring it to your father so that he will bless you before he dies."²²⁵ Yaakov tried to get out of it by saying: "Maybe my father will feel me...and I will bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing."²²⁶ Rivkah responded: "Let any curse be upon me, my

223 Bereshit 21:12.

224 This concept first appears in the Midrash Tanchuma (Parashat Lech Lecha, section 9). This exact expression of the idea first appears in the Shela Ha-Kadosh (Torah She-Biichtav, end of Parashat Vayishlach).

225 Bereshit 27:8.

226 Bereshit 27:12.

son. But listen to me and go and bring what I asked."²²⁷ In other words, "Do what you're told! I know better than you and that's an order!" Yitzchak sensed that something was wrong when Yaakov came; there was a contradictory duality. "The voice is the voice of Yaakov but the hands are the hands of Esav."²²⁸ The voice expresses thought and the spiritual world, while the hands represent the realm of action."²²⁹

Question: Since Yaakov was disguised as Esav, doesn't this show that this task was not compatible with his character.

Answer: When there is no choice, we even have to do things that do not suit us. If Esav cannot fulfill his task then Yaakov is forced to take over, despite the fact that Yaakov's natural expertise is not for worldly matters but for spiritual ones. There are nations who in their own fields are adept than Israel. It is true that Israel contains all human talents²³⁰ in the same way that human beings possess all talents that animals have, but individual nations may surpass us in a particular characteristic that is its specialty. We share the materialistic aspects of life with the non-Jews, but that is their area of specialization, not ours. Attempts to take over other people's tasks lead to disaster. The non-Jew's meddling in spirituality led to the birth of Christianity and Islam, while our degen-

²²⁷ Bereshit 27:13.

²²⁸ Bereshit 27:22.

²²⁹ Bereshit 27:27. Similarly in the following verse (28), "See my son's fragrance is like the perfume of a field, blessed by G-d." The "field" is the world of action but "blessed by G-d" means that it draws from the spiritual sphere.

²³⁰ Chullin 56b - "an all encompassing city" (translator).

eration into pre-occupation with material matters led to the neglect of the spirit. At this juncture, Israel also had to perform Esav's worldly mission. Yaakov was therefore given a blessing for material success using honest and upright tactics. "May Hashem give you of the dew of the heaven and the fatness of the earth...Nations will serve you...be a lord to your kinsmen...may they that bless you be blessed."²³¹ The physical world was now in the righteous hands of Yaakov Avinu who would manage it in holiness, according to Hashem's will.

8. Yaakov's Spiritual Blessing

At the end of this Torah portion, Yaakov was given his original blessing as the firstborn who was to manage the world's spirituality. He received this blessing with ease since this was originally designed for him. "May Hashem make you an assembly of peoples. May He give you and your descendants the blessing of Avraham that you take possession of the Land that G-d gave to Avraham, where you lived previously only as a foreigner."²³² Yaakov is the spiritual successor of Avraham and is thus in charge of building up the inner essence of the world. After the original change of tasks, there was a further modification when Yaakov adopted both functions. Yaakov now wore two hats simultaneously: the super-

²³¹ Bereshit 27:28.

²³² Bereshit 28:3.

vision of the world's material advancement and the guide for the world's spiritual improvement.

Haftarah for Parashat Toldot

A True Cohain

[Ashkenazim/Sefardim: Malachi 1:1-2:7

Yemenite Jews: Malachi 1:1-3:4]

In our Haftarah, the prophet Malachi bitterly laments the catastrophic state of the priesthood during the period of the Second Temple: the cohanim had turned into the lowest level of technocrats offering sacrifices. Following the behavior of the cohanim, Malachi warns with anger: "Hashem of Hosts says to you: O Cohanim, you who despise My name. And you respond: In what way have we despised Your name? You offer disgusting bread on My altar and you say: In what way have we polluted You?" (Malachi 1:6-7). The prophet emphasizes that the religion has changed radically from what it is supposed to be, service and closeness to Hashem, into something mechanical, a ruse close to idol worship, a device designed to attain favors from Heaven. If service of Hashem could sink to the level of business for profit, why shouldn't the cohanim limit their expenses? They simply decided: we have spoiled food which cannot be used, so why don't we save money by offering it on the al-

tar? After all, either way it will be burned in the fire, and G-d Himself will not notice anything!

The cohanim were unaware of the seriousness of their behavior, and their attempts at justification made their transgression even worse. "In that you say: The table of Hashem is contemptible" (7). You are profaning Hashem's Name and turning the religion into a business of fraud. "And if you offer the blind for a sacrifice, is it not evil? And if you offer lame and sick animals, is it not evil? Please offer it to your governor; will he be pleased with you or will he show you favor? – says Hashem of Hosts" (8). "You have brought stolen, lame and sick animals as a sacrifice. Should I accept this from your hand? – says Hashem" (13). We must not forget that a worker in the Temple, whether a cohan or a levi, is before all else an educator. Before his death, Moshe Rabbenu described the role of the Tribe of Levi in this way: "They shall teach Your statutes to Yaakov and Your Torah to Israel. They shall place incense before Your presence and burnt offerings on Your altar" (Devarim 33:10).

They were obviously involved in the holy service in the Temple, but they also had great influence over Torah learning throughout the entire Land. Their role in the Temple only occupied them for a few weeks each year. During the remaining time, they would travel from place to place to teach, educate and build spirituality. This was all in order to come closer to G-d, since they themselves were capable of getting ensnared in the monotonous routine of daily life and

forgetting about the light (Maran Ha-Rav Kook in Orot, Orot Ha-Techiya 4).

Our prophets returned to this topic with a special emphasis. "And you should know that I have sent this commandment to you, so that My covenant will be with Levi, says Hashem of Hosts. My covenant was with him for life and peace, and I gave them fear with which he feared Me and was afraid of My Name" (Malachi 2:4-5). The cochain – and in our time, the educator - needs to actualize in his own life the great ideals which he will teach to others: awe of Hashem and humility. The Divine service he performed in the Temple was not merely the focus of his activities - it had to be his way of life as well. His service was built upon an inner sense of nullifying one's ego before the Creator, a merging of one's character with the Divine light. "The Torah of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found on his lips" (6). The character became united with the Torah in all of its truth. Intellect and emotion are Torah, the body and the spirit are Torah. And unjust words never departed his lips.

His behavior was to be without stain, and his societal relations were to be the climax of his purity: "He walked with me in peace and uprightness" (6). Closeness to Hashem must reveal itself not only in the highest spheres of his character but also in his interpersonal relations. When people would meet a person such as this, they would have to be influenced. Before they would judge the cochain on his actions or his worship, they would judge him on his behavior

towards other people. They thus would see that the Kingdom of Hashem is not only in Heaven, but is also on earth; that the awe of Hashem which fills and directs the cochain is expressed through behavior of peace and love. Therefore, "many turned away from iniquity" (6). In order to return others to the straight path, one must first be an example of uprightness himself.

"For the cochain's lips should keep knowledge and they should seek Torah from his mouth" (7): The cochain is a man of knowledge, a Torah scholar, but the essence is "for he is an angel of Hashem of Hosts" (ibid.). He is an angel on earth! This expression says it all! Our Sages rule that one should only learn Torah from a rabbi without blemish. "If the rabbi is similar to an angel of Hashem, seek Torah from his mouth, and if not, do not seek Torah from his mouth" (Moed Katan 17a).

The Torah is not only a theoretical science, it is instruction for life. It is told that a professor of Jewish thought was asked by a student: "Why doesn't his honor perform what he teaches?" He responded: "Does a math professor have to be a triangle?" The comparison obviously lacks reason.

Our Sages tell us that in a large city in Babylonia, with many wise people, there was once a great rabbi who allowed himself to be involved in extra-marital relations – and this caused major gossip. The Sages were extremely distressed by this desecration of Hashem's Name. After a difficult discussion, they decided to excommunicate him (Moed Katan

ibid.). One needs great courage for a decision such as this, but it was necessary since their rabbi, despite his wisdom, was far from being an angel of Hashem.

VAYETZE

1. Yaakov – A Dual Personality
2. Yaakov's Dreams
3. A Double Wife
4. Rachel and Leah
5. Yaakov's Love of Rachel and Leah
6. The Sons of Rachel and the Sons of Leah

1. Yaakov – A Dual Personality

Yaakov emerged from the previous *parashah* equipped to perform two tasks: the moralization of the physical world and the advancement of the spiritual world. Yaakov was destined to ameliorate both the means and the tools for fulfilling our objectives and to improve and uplift the very soul of our existence; the purpose of our existence.²³³

2. Yaakov's Dreams

When Yaakov left Beer Sheva, fleeing from his brother, his

²³³ Orot, Orot Ha-Techiyah, p. 16.

situation was far from ideal. He was homeless, unmarried, poor and in fact completely penniless. He was the first exile in our history, as he fled for his life. What did the future hold in store for him and what would become of him? These questions must have gnawed away at him in his flight. Then Yaakov had a dream. There are different types of dreams. There are lofty dreams which are sparks of prophecy and there are dreams that are complete nonsense. "A man is only shown in his dreams things about which he has given great thought."²³⁴ The content of the dream therefore depends on who is dreaming and the quality of his thoughts (an example of this is given in the Gemara²³⁵ when Shevor Malka, the King of Persia, said to the Talmudic Rabbi, Shmuel: "People say that you are a sage, if this is really so tell me what I will dream about tonight." Shmuel answered him: "You will dream that you have been routed by the Roman army and have been taken prisoner where you are forced to grind date pits with a golden mill." The strangeness of the answer bothered him so much that he thought about it the entire day and sure enough that night he dreamt exactly this). Yaakov's dream reflects his innermost thoughts, and his *raison d'etre* in life.²³⁶ There are two elements in his dream. One is the Divine promise: "I am G-d...The Land upon which you are lying I will give to you and to your descendants. Your offspring will be like the dust of the earth.

²³⁴ Bereachot 55b.

²³⁵ Berachot 56.

²³⁶ Moreh Nevuchim, part 1 chapter 36 – On dreams.

You shall burst forth and spread to the west, east, north and south...I am with you. I will protect you wherever you go and bring you back to this Land. I will not leave you until I have fully kept this promise to you."²³⁷

In contrast with his present pitiful and humiliating state, Hashem promised to guard him and protect him in the long trek to the glorious future which would inevitably eventuate.

The other element of the dream was the vision of the ladder. "And behold he dreamed and a ladder was set on the earth and its top reached up toward heaven."²³⁸ The ladder links heaven with earth. It is "set towards earth,"²³⁹ i.e. from heavenly matters it directs itself towards earthly items. But it also "reaches heaven"²⁴⁰ meaning that all earthly needs draw their significance from heavenly considerations.

The ladder is Yaakov himself who is simultaneously both heavenly and earthly. He embodies spirituality which is used to improve the physical world, but he also lives a **material** existence, which is governed by the spirit. These are the two faces of Yaakov.

The vision is not static. There is dynamic movement as "the angels of G-d ascend and descend it [the ladder]."²⁴¹ They ascend to heaven to charge themselves with Divine spiritu-

²³⁷ Bereshit 28:13-15.

²³⁸ Bereshit 28:12.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

ality and then descend to illuminate the world with it. The righteous do not suffice with a personal spiritual elevating experience, but they return to the mundane world and use their spiritual acquisition to improve it.²⁴² In the *Akeidah* experience, Avraham reached such awe-inspiring spiritual heights that the lads that had accompanied him on the way were not allowed to be present. Despite the fact that the two attendants were none other than the two outstanding personalities, Yishmael and Eliezer,²⁴³ Avraham instruct them: "Stay here with the **donkey**, while I and the lad will go yonder."²⁴⁴ Avraham's trust in Eliezer was so profound that he sent him to find a wife for Yitzchak who would share in the momentous task of founding the Jewish Nation. Furthermore, it is said of him: "He drew forth teachings from his Rav and transmitted them to others."²⁴⁵ Despite these qualities, with regard to the sublime spiritual revelation at the *Akeidah*, Yishmael and Eliezer were equivalent to the donkey. The verse says: "stay here with the donkey" and our Rabbis add that in relation to the *Akeidah*: "You are people who are no better than a donkey."²⁴⁶ This event would be so outrageously incomprehensible that if witnessed by them they would either be struck mad or lose all faith in G-d.

242 Moreh Nevuchim 1, chapter 15.

243 Rashi on Bereshit 22:5.

244 Bereshit 22:5.

245 Yoma 28b. This means that he learned and spread the word of G-d that he learned from Avraham.

246 Yevamot 62a.

Avraham therefore proceeded alone and ascended to such heights that it was beyond the grasp of ordinary human morality. Did Avraham remain in his heavenly state, detached from and unconcerned with the prosaic world? No! "And Avraham **returned** to his lads and they **arose** and went **together** to Beer Sheva."²⁴⁷ Despite his soul's leap to terrestrial loftiness, Avraham remained attached to his material surroundings and endeavored to inspire them. He stooped down to the lads that had remained at the level of the donkey and offered them a helping hand in order to uplift and advance them.²⁴⁸ Moreover, his very descent paved the way for the next ascent.

Then Yaakov awoke from the dream, "And he was frightened. He exclaimed: 'How awe-inspiring is this place! It must be G-d's Temple. It is the gate to heaven!'"²⁴⁹ He did not attribute the privilege of this vision to himself but to the sanctity of the place. He thus did not even thank Hashem for this prophetic vision and for all the promises made to him. He knew that through the holiness of *Eretz Yisrael*, which was the "house of G-d and the gate of heaven," he would be able to fulfill his task of connecting heaven and earth. The Divine Presence existed here on earth and the mundane aspired towards heaven.²⁵⁰ "The Holy One Blessed Be He rolled together the whole of *Eretz Yisrael* un-

247 Bereshit 22:19.

248 Olat Re'eiyah vol. 1, p. 96.

249 Bereshit 29:17.

250 Kuzari – section 2.

der him [Yaakov]."²⁵¹ Yaakov dreamed that in this special environment of *Eretz Yisrael* he would manage to perform the task for which he was so suited: uniting heaven and earth.

3. A Double Wife

A two-sided man needs a double wife. If such a wife is unavailable then he needs two wives: one for the "Yaakov" in him and one for the "Yisrael" in him. The name "Yisrael" means the "straightforward G-d," i.e. a person whose relationship to G-d is on such a high spiritual plane that he is above all the complexities of this world. "Yaakov," however, means the person who follows the crooked and tortuous path of the physical world in order to promote the world to a purer state. When he came to Charan, he was the only person who was capable of dislodging the stone from the top of the well. This was his expertise: the removal of blockages from the Divine "well" to allow its waters to disperse and vitalize the world. The "double" man therefore needed two wives. A house with two wives inevitably leads to complications because of their rivalry. And this case was no exception! One of the wives was preferred while the other, in comparison, was rejected. The Jewish Nation was welded

²⁵¹ Rashi on Bereshit 28:13.

out of this complex situation. "Like Rachel and Leah both of whom built the house of Israel."²⁵²

4. Rachel and Leah

All matters related to Rachel are conspicuous and manifest. Just like Rivkah, who a generation earlier had come to the well and with clear and boundless kindness had drawn enough water for Eliezer and all his camels to drink, so too were the events with Rachel clear and obvious. "She was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance."²⁵³ Her beauty was apparent to all. Yaakov's ties with her were also clearly visible. "Yaakov kissed Rachel...And he related to her that he was her father's relation."²⁵⁴ There is a simple straightforward and open discussion between them. The match, together with all its terms, was manifest to all.

In contrast, Leah is hidden. Only her eyes are described. "The eyes of Leah were delicate."²⁵⁵ She can be compared to the eye, which when closed, is completely hidden. We have no information about her. Even her wedding was cloaked in secrecy. Her entry into Yaakov's life was unexpectedly sudden, unprepared by any preconditions or prior

252 Ruth 4:11.

253 Bereshit 29:11-12.

254 Ibid.

255 Bereshit 29:17.

agreements. "And behold in the morning it was Leah."²⁵⁶ Even then there was no communication between them. We do not even hear any words of rebuke to Leah for her deception (It is true that our Sages relate that Yaakov severely censured Leah for her behavior, but we must note that the Torah intentionally makes no mention of his indignation). Silence! Throughout their marriage there are no reported exchanges between them. Leah is concealed in mystery. The Zohar succinctly describes the difference between the two sisters. "Rachel embodies the revealed world while Leah embodies the hidden and mystical world."²⁵⁷

Rachel is the source of the tangible national **body**. She is the material word, but in its purest state. "She was beautiful of form and beautiful of **appearance**."²⁵⁸ Rashi explains there that "appearance" means her "countenance was radiant." The inner spiritual purity radiated outwards and illuminated the material world.²⁵⁹ Rachel however was the junior while Leah was both older and her spiritual superior. "Leah's eyes were delicate." The eyes reflect externally the quality of the soul which is hidden from view. Leah is thus the source of the **soul** of the Jewish Nation. Leah has primacy, and was thus originally destined to marry Esav who was also the

²⁵⁶ Bereshit 29:25.

²⁵⁷ Zohar 1, p. 54. Orot Ha-Kodesh 1, p. 29. Collected statements of the Gra at the end of Sifra De-Zeniuta.

²⁵⁸ Bereshit 29:17.

²⁵⁹ The letters of the Hebrew words for "face" and "inner essence" are the same, indicating a deep relationship between them (translator).

first-born (Her profuse tears however managed to cancel this terrible decree). In our liturgy, there are two midnight prayers, "Tikkun Leah" and "Tikkun Rachel," which reflect the spirit of these two mothers. "Tikkun Leah" is joyful because deep down in the soul and in the world of ideas everything is joyous and perfect. It is in the physical and practical world that the complications arise. These crises and calamities occur and "Tikkun Rachel" is thus sad because of the imperfect and unfulfilled state of this material world (It is for this reason that during joyous times, such as Shabbat, Festivals and the Shemittah (Sabbatical) Year, it is not recited). In brief, Rachel contained the talent for the improvement of the material world while Leah's expertise was for spiritual advancement.

5. Yaakov's Love of Rachel and Leah

Yaakov deeply loved Rachel as is stated: "Yaakov worked seven years for Rachel. But he loved her so much, it seemed like no more than a few days."²⁶⁰ It was not a carnal love but a holy and lofty one based on a profound harmony between their souls. The proof of this is that he was with Leah for an entire night, thinking that she was Rachel and yet only in the morning did he discover the switch. His attraction to Rachel was clearly not bodily since he knew nothing about it and could thus be deceived for an entire night. Their bond

260 Bereshit 29:20.

was idealistic and spiritual. All the same, he loved **her** for what she was **now**.

Leah, however, was "disliked." This does not mean, G-d forbid, that he really hated her. Yaakov loved everyone, he even called the shepherds "my brothers."²⁶¹ Leah was simply less loved than Rachel, as it says: "But he loved Rachel **more** than Leah."²⁶² She feels "disliked" because she knows that as far as her husband is concerned she is the subordinate wife. Yaakov, however, does slowly develop a deep love towards her, not as his wife but as the mother of his children.²⁶³

Yaakov's love for Rachel, despite all its sublimity, was not the ultimate in love. His love of Leah ended up deeper and more elevated. His love of Rachel, although it was a love in the depth of his soul, was a **personal** love of her. His love for Leah, however, centered on the creation of future generations and on the desire for continuance. By marrying and having children, one becomes "eternal" in this world since he is continued by his offspring. The heart of romantic love is, deep down, the love of and desire for continued existence. The Torah, by determining that the mitzvah is not

261 Bereshit 29:4.

262 Bereshit 29:30.

263 On the birth of her first son, she calls him "Reuven" ("see a son") and says "now my husband will love me" (Bereshit 29:32). On the birth of her third son, she says "Now my husband will be attached (Hebrew - "Levi") to me because I have already given him three sons" (ibid. 29:34). And this pattern continues.

marriage but procreation, makes abundantly clear that the purpose of marriage is not mutual pleasure and convenience but the bearing of children to ensure future generations. There is even an opinion that this command can be fulfilled with a concubine.²⁶⁴ G-d forbid that a person should act in such a shameful way, but the letter of the law indicates what is at the heart of the matter. A husband and wife must naturally love and respect each other on a personal level, but all of this stems from a deeper purpose. Maran (our revered teacher) Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook expresses this idea as: "Sexual impulses have been given to us in order to ensure the future of the world and of mankind."²⁶⁵

Since Yaakov's love of Rachel was personal and unrelated to the propagation of future generations, their bond was infertile. Yaakov's spiritual romance must give way to a love which bears with it the responsibility of maintaining the continuity of mankind. Rachel demanded in painful exasperation: "Give me children or let me die!"²⁶⁶ She implored G-d to be fertile like her sister,²⁶⁷ and Hashem finally opened her womb.²⁶⁸ Her troubles, however, were not yet over. She died in childbirth when Binyamin was born.²⁶⁹ Rachel's temporary kingdom had to vacate its place for Leah's perma-

264 The Rosh on Ketubot 1:12.

265 Orot Ha-Kodesh Part 3, p. 299.

266 Bereshit 30:1.

267 See Rashi's second explanation and Onkelos on Bereshit 30:8.

268 Bereshit 30:22.

269 Ibid. 35:17-18.

nent kingdom to take over. The essential, romantic love was a preparation for the supreme state for them to "become one flesh."²⁷⁰ This occurs when children are born, "for the child is created by both parents and in it their flesh becomes one and united."²⁷¹ Both Rachel and Leah built the complete House of Israel.

6. The Sons of Rachel and the Sons of Leah

Yaakov had four wives altogether: two of them were the main wives and the other two were secondary. Nonetheless, all of them together with their children, are integral parts of the holy Jewish Nation.²⁷² This is in contrast to Avraham who had two wives: Sarah, who together with her son Yitzchak, was within the Nation and Hagar, who with her son Yishmael, was rejected from the Nation. It also differs from Yitzchak who had only **one** wife but **two** sons: Yaakov who belonged to the Jewish Nation and Esav who was an outsider. We understand that just as the wives were distinctly different types, so too did their sons differ. The two major groups were the sons of Leah and the sons of Rachel. Yehudah was born to Leah. The letters of his name comprise the name of G-d with the added letter "dalet." This letter's numerical value is four, and denotes the four different

²⁷⁰ Bereshit 2:24.

²⁷¹ Rashi on *ibid*.

²⁷² The souls of **all** his descendants received the Torah at Mt. Sinai – Shabbat 146a.

directions of this physical world. He thus embodies spirituality – G-d's name – that is present in the material world – the dalet. Yosef, in contrast, who was born from Rachel, inherited from her the ability to structure and improve the material world. Yosef just like Yehudah occupies an important position both in Yaakov's blessings to his sons²⁷³ and in Moshe's blessings to the Tribes.²⁷⁴ In a sense, they are matched. Yosef was practically active: he ruled Egypt, he fed the world and he organized the world economy.²⁷⁵ Even his dreams centered around practical matters of agriculture and leadership.²⁷⁶ He is Esav's "adversary" because he can counteract him on his own ground. What Esav can do, Yosef can do better, just as his name implies: "Yosef" means to "add" or "increase" and hints at the fact that he is blessed with this capacity. He possesses the same talent: the ability to overcome obstacles and to improve the physical world. As soon as he was born, Yaakov sensed that the Jewish People now possessed all the characteristics needed to perform their historic task and set off on his return home to *Eretz Yisrael*. As the same verse states: "After Rachel had given birth to Yosef, Yaakov said to Lavan: "Let me leave. I want to go home to my Land."²⁷⁷ Rashi comments there: "After the birth of him

273 Bereshit chapter 49 – Yehudah beginning at verse 8 and Yosef beginning at verse 22.

274 Devarim chapter 33 – Yehudah in verse 7 and Yosef beginning at verse 13.

275 Bereshit chapters 41 and 47.

276 Bereshit 37:7: "Your sheaves formed a circle around my sheaf and bowed down to it."

277 Bereshit 30:25.

who was to become Esav's adversary as it says in Ovadiah (1:18): 'And the house of Yaakov shall be fire and the house of Yosef a flame and the house of Esav stubble.' Fire (Yaakov) without a flame (Yosef) has no effect at a distance. Therefore when Yosef was born, Yaakov put his trust in the Holy One Blessed Be He and wished to return home."

After Yosef grew up, Yaakov faded out and disappeared behind the scenes. Yosef took over his rule as the main character. He was able to fulfill Yaakov's task to the utmost by totally consuming Esav. The "Esavy" non-Jewish cultures and technologies are overruled as Yosef creates a virtuous and righteous practical world. He was given the designation "Yosef the Righteous" after he had withstood the wily enticement of Potifar's wife. He was not the type of righteous individual who only lived in the holy environment of the *ye-shiva*. On the contrary, he was exposed to the most extreme temptations of the physical world and he withstood them.

One of the questions that the Elders of Athens asked Rabbi Yehoshua was: "How does one cut out a garden-bed of swords?" He answered: "With the horn of a donkey." Esav and his descendants have created a violent world culture wherein man lives by the sword and on the knife. Who can possibly subdue them? The donkey's horn! The bull's horn is familiar to us as Yosef from Moshe Rabbenu's blessing to him: "His glory is like a first-born ox and his horns are the horns of the *re'eim*. With both of them, he shall gore nations

to the end of the earth."²⁷⁸ Yosef using Esav's own tactics can overcome him, but not alone. He needs to be a horn in the head of a donkey. The donkey represents the Messiah, the son of David, who comes from the Tribe of Yehudah, who is described as a "poor man"²⁷⁹ (i.e. a humble person) riding on a donkey rather than riding in on a grand stallion.²⁸⁰ The practical skills and physical valor of *Mashiach ben Yosef* (Messiah son of Yosef), the descendant of Rachel, needs to join forces with and draw inspiration from the inner spiritual strength of *Mashiach ben David* (Messiah son of David), the descendant of Leah. Operating together in the world's "garden-bed," they will succeed in eradicating the weapons, violence and wickedness from the world.

278 Devarim 33:17-18.

279 Zechariah 9:9.

280 According to the commentary of the Gra on the riddles of the elder of Athens (Bechorot 8b).

Haftarah for Parashat Vayetze

Two Types of Repentance

[Ashkenazim/Sefardim: Hoshea 11:7-12:12

Yemenite Jews: Hoshea 11:7-12:14]

Our Haftarah presents us with two types of repentance: repentance unto Hashem and repentance to Hashem.

In his rebuke of the Nation of Israel, who was deeply entrenched in sin, the prophet Hoshea proclaimed: "Israel, return unto Hashem your G-d for you have stumbled in your iniquity. Take words with you and return to Hashem" (Hoshea 14:2-3). This linguistic pair "unto/to" is repeated numerous times, showing us that it has special significance (and in general, there is nothing fortuitous in the Tanach). We see this doubling in other places: "Yet even now, says Hashem, return unto me...and return to Hashem your G-d" (Yoel 2:12-13). And we read about the prophet Yirmiyahu: "Let us search and examine our ways, and return unto Hashem, Let us lift up our heart with our hands to G-d in heaven" (Eichah 3:40-41). When we turn to the Oral Torah, we find a statement from our Sages that proper behavior which is not for its own sake reaches unto the heavens,

while proper behavior for its own sake reaches to the heavens (Pesachim 50b). In order to complete the list, we turn to the Torah itself: "And you will return unto Hashem your G-d...when you will return to Hashem" (Devarim 30:2-11).

It is quite clear that there is a distinction being made here, and we must try to figure out what these words mean with regards to repentance. For this purpose, we permit ourselves to use the language of mathematicians. The word "unto" ("ad" in Hebrew) means that the borders are not included and "to" ("el" in Hebrew) means that the borders are included. Therefore, repentance unto Hashem does not include Hashem Himself. But is repentance without Hashem possible?

Based on the theory of Maran Ha-Rav Kook, this type of repentance is seen in the Zionist movement, which has shaken the Nation of Israel over the last one hundred and twenty years. He wrote at the end of his book "Orot Ha-Teshuvah" that the awakening of the Nation to return to its Land, its identity, its spirit and its character truly contains the light of repentance in it. And this phenomenon is fully clarified by the Torah's expression: "And you will return unto Hashem your G-d...when you will return to Hashem" (Orot Ha-Teshuvah 17, 2).

Is it possible to find a rational explanation for a movement that causes the return of the Nation of Israel to its Land? At the time of Maran Ha-Rav Kook, this movement was at its modest beginnings. In our time, we have a state, an army,

an economy, a living language and many of the fundamentals which contribute towards our national revival. There are those who will protest: Zionism is a completely secular movement! But do they know what is hidden in the recesses of the soul of Israel? Have they penetrated our national sub-consciousness?

Maran Ha-Rav Kook (ibid.) concluded that this is inner repentance that is “covered over”, but there is absolutely no impediment which can prevent the supreme light from appearing upon us.

Secular Israelis envisioned for themselves a Holy Land without holiness, a holy language free of holiness, a Kingdom of Hashem on earth without Hashem, an army of Hashem without a King on High, even a Tanach free of Torah. But we are not led astray by this. We see the immeasurable self-sacrifice which allowed the national revival of the Nation of Israel. We know with full confidence that the Jewish soul – including the pioneers before the establishment of the State and the soldiers after the establishment of the State until this very day – yearns for this return to, this inner repentance.

We are therefore optimistic. We are confident that the Jews who repented unto Hashem will eventually repent to Hashem and everyone will be transformed into lovers of Torah. And then all of the lovers of Zion will also become lovers of the G-d of Zion.

VAYISHLACH

1. Yaakov Our Forefather – Adversities
2. Adversity in the World
3. Yaakov – Struggling with Hardships
4. You Have Struggled with Heavenly Beings and Man and Have Won
5. The Displaced Tendon and the Rationale for *Mitzvot*
6. "And He Limped on His Hip"
7. "And Yaakov Came Unimpaired"

1. Yaakov Our Forefather – Adversities

Yaakov returned to *Eretz Yisrael*, but his life was also beset by adversity there. In fact, he suffered throughout his lifetime, starting from his conception when "the children clashed within her"²⁸¹ (in the mother's womb) and on through the birth when "his hand grasped the heel of Esav."²⁸² He then had to buy the birthright,²⁸³ he received

²⁸¹ Bereshit 25:22.

²⁸² Ibid. verse 26. Rashi explains that he was struggling to seize his rightful position as the first born (translator).

²⁸³ Ibid. verse 33.

his father's blessing by deceit,²⁸⁴ he was forced to flee to Charan to save himself from his brother Esav who was plotting to kill him,²⁸⁵ his planned wife, Rachel, was switched to her sister, Leah, whom he was duped to marry,²⁸⁶ Lavan changed his wages ten times in an attempt to swindle him,²⁸⁷ he had a confrontation with his "loving" brother Esav on his return home,²⁸⁸ the rape and abduction of Dinah and the reprisal attack on the city of Shechem,²⁸⁹ Yosef's brothers' hatred of him,²⁹⁰ the loss of his most beloved son Yosef,²⁹¹ the imprisonment of Shimon and later of Binyamin,²⁹² the crossing of his hands and the switch of his blessings to his grandsons,²⁹³ etc... There was not a period in his life free of hardships and tribulations. The greater a matter is, the more trouble and afflictions are associated with it. Yaakov is the most ideal of the forefathers,²⁹⁴ because he was the final product – the full-blown Jew – that resulted from the creative process that was transpiring through our forefathers, Avraham and Yitzchak. "It was Yaakov who redeemed."²⁹⁵

284 Ibid. 27:6-29.

285 Ibid. verses 41-46.

286 Ibid. 29:20-25.

287 Ibid. 31:41 and 30:28-43.

288 Ibid.32:3-33:18.

289 Ibid. chapter 34.

290 Ibid. 37:1-12.

291 Ibid. 37:12-36.

292 Ibid. chapters 43-44.

293 Ibid. 48:10-21.

294 Bereshit Rabbah 76:1.

295 Yeshayahu 29:22. This interpretation and translation is not the plain meaning

Avraham's very existence is justified and gains significance by virtue of the fact that Yaakov is his descendant. Yaakov's life is beset by complications specifically because of his greatness.²⁹⁶

2. Adversity in the World

Question: What is the significance of these hardships? Do they have a purpose?

Answer: One of the simple facts of life is that misfortunes exist in the world. True, "G-d made man upright but they chased after many intrigues."²⁹⁷ Everything is perfectly harmonious at the source, but complications arise as matters evolve and materialize in the practical world. The key question is how one reacts to all these problems.

There are three different approaches to life's vicissitudes. The first approach is that everything is really good and what appears to be a disaster is simply delusion. This is the drunkard's view as the Gemara explains the verse: "One who puts his eye on the cup (indulges in drinking) walks straight,"²⁹⁸ i.e. the whole world appears to him like a

of the verse and does not follow the punctuation of the cantillation notes. The Rabbis however interpret it as presented here (translator).

²⁹⁶ Zohar, Bereshit 207.

²⁹⁷ Kohelet 7:29.

²⁹⁸ Mishlei 23:31.

plain."²⁹⁹ He sees no hardships on setbacks, since the whole of life seems to him simple and smooth sailing. Using this assumption that there is no evil in the world, a certain philosopher developed a whole life philosophy.³⁰⁰ A famous opponent lampooned this view in a parody whose hero postulated that this is the best of all possible worlds.³⁰¹ By intentionally exaggerating this approach, he approached the absurdity of this claim. There is however an element of depth in this view which is demonstrated by Yitzchak as will be discussed further on (section 3). In essence, it is true that there is no evil for "everything that G-d does is for best."³⁰² This profound idea must be understood in depth. In order to prevent the masses from a superficially distorted understanding of lofty concepts, philosophers (and distinct from the aforementioned, our holy great Rabbis as well) would ridicule these shallow perceptions. Here, for example, such a misconception could lead to the conclusion that we don't need to improve the world in any way, and that schools, hospital and the like are unnecessary since everything is already perfect.

The second approach recognizes that there are hardships in the world but succumbs to them saying: "What can you do, that's how things are." The person sinks into a passive state

299 Yoma 75a.

300 Leibnitz in his Theodicee.

301 Voltaire.

302 Berachot 60b.

of helplessness and despair. He is overcome by the adversity.

The third approach is to fight. We are fully aware that afflictions always existed and will continue to exist but we are not going to give in, we will battle them and overcome them. There is bad in the world but by a persistent, concerted effort the world will be redeemed from its misery.

3. Yaakov – Struggling with Hardships

Yaakov followed the third course outlined above and struggled against all setbacks.

Question: Avraham and Yitzchak also had problems, so what is the difference between him and them?

Answer: It is true that Avraham and Yitzchak had misfortunes, but they were presented and tackled very differently by each of them. For example, Avraham fought four kings who he pursued all the way to Damascus. Life contains unpleasant incidents but Avraham, this giant of a man, was way above all hardships. He controlled matters with dynamic energy, he won out and he was the master of the situation as all stages.

Yitzchak also clashed with worldly problems. The Philistines kept blocking up the wells that his shepherds had dug.³⁰³ He

303 Bereshit 26:18.

too was way above all these woes, but, distinct from Avraham, he did not battle and overcome the hardships, he simply sidesteps them. It was impossible to embroil him in the world's troubles, because he was simply above it all. He never quarreled, only his shepherds did. When he was involved in the world, Hashem blessed him over and above what anyone else could receive, as it says: "That year he reaped a hundredfold [as much as he sowed] for G-d had blessed him."³⁰⁴ He nonetheless remained heavenly. He was controlled by events. It was not a passiveness of succumbing but of being lead by G-d. He belonged to a world which was above the complications and entanglements of this world, where everything works out "by itself" for the best. He was **taken** to the *Akedah*. His blessings to his sons were "**stolen**" by complex deception and yet it turned out that they were given to the right people. He was matched up with his wife without being consulted and the match was blessed. "And he brought her to his mother's tent...and he loved her."³⁰⁵ Yitzchak belonged to the lofty source, the level at which there is no evil.

In contrast, Yaakov was in the very thick of worldly hardships. He did submit, however, he accepted the challenge and grappled with all the troubles. He was beset by adversity but he fought back. He was called "Yaakov," which means he "followed" – he followed events waiting for the right mo-

304 Bereshit 26:12.

305 Bereshit 24:67.

ment to intervene and tip the scales in his favor. He battled back and was built-up out of the adversity. From the very beginning, he had to fight his cause. Our Rabbis interpret the verse: "And the children struggled together within her"³⁰⁶ as meaning that Yaakov and Esav "quarreled as to how they should divide up the two worlds as their inheritance."³⁰⁷ Later at his birth, "he [Yaakov] seized the heel of Esav."³⁰⁸ He was not willing to forgo his birthright, which really belonged to him, and eventually he got it by buying it (A similar struggle reappeared among his descendants, Peretz and Zerach, the sons of Yehudah. Peretz, who was in line to be born second thrust himself in front of his brother Zerach who had already protruded his hand. The *Mashiach ben David* will be a descendant of Peretz. This is a more advanced version of the "intra-womb fray"). He later, with his mother's help, contested the blessing of Yitzchak, and succeeded. Esav's anger knew no bounds to the point that he wanted to kill him. Yaakov was forced to flee to Charan where he began to build a new life for himself. Later when Rachel was switched with Leah, he did not moan and mope over it nor did he try to ignore the problem. He did not pour his broken heart out in mournful love songs over what had happened (unlike certain writers who turn failures in these matters into

306 Bereshit 25:22.

307 Rashi ibid. from the Yalkut Shimoni. They disputed who was to receive "this world" and the "World to Come."

308 Bereshit 25:26. He attempted to hold Esav back so that he should be born first. See Rashi there.

a veritable source of income as they write lengthy sagas about their blighted romantic hopes). Yaakov courageously utilized even this as a lever for further advancement. He now had both Leah and Rachel. Similarly, when Lavan changed his wages ten times, Yaakov did not give in.³⁰⁹ Even though the wages were changed from speckled flock to rings ones, etc...,³¹⁰ Yaakov always overcame the difficulties so that finally: "the man became exceedingly wealthy. He had many sheep and goats as well as slaves and maid-servants, camels and donkeys."³¹¹ He later fled from his father-in-law, Lavan, who chased him with murderous intent. In the end, Yaakov managed to turn the tables and they made a peace pact between them. Similarly, in his encounter with his outraged brother, Esav, he managed to win him over, at least temporarily. The despicable attack and abduction of Dinah, accompanied by the pain and humiliation eventually led to the conquest of Shechem, as it says: "I am giving you Shechem which I took from the Emorites with my sword and my bow."³¹² The imminent threat of reprisal attacks from the surrounding nations was averted because "the terror of G-d fell upon the surrounding cities so they did not pursue Yaakov's sons."³¹³ And this continued throughout

309 Rashi on Bereshit 31:7 in the name of the Midrash says that he in fact switched the wages one hundred times.

310 Bereshit 31:8.

311 Bereshit 30:43.

312 Bereshit 48:22.

313 Bereshit 35:5.

his lifetime. The harsh reality is that the world is full of misfortunes but we have to know how to grapple with them and use them as an opportunity for further advancement.

4. You Have Struggled with Heavenly Beings and Man and Have Won³¹⁴

The peak of Yaakov's clashes was when he encountered the "nocturnal man" that "wrestled with him until the break of dawn."³¹⁵ Who was that man? The answer is not specified in the verses but it **is** clear to Yaakov that there is Divine involvement in these events and so "he called the place Peni'el (Divine Face), saying: 'I have seen the Divine face-to-face, yet my life was spared.'"³¹⁶ This "man" informed Yaakov of Hashem's support for him in his struggles, "You have struggled with Heavenly beings and man and have won." Hashem defines Yaakov as a "fighter." He contains the qualities of both his names. "Yaakov" means that he followed events and comes to grips with them. He is also "Yisrael" because he attacked at the vulnerable points and "overcame" all adversity, both human and terrestrial. He fought all the evil of the world, including his "evil impulse" within him which is really part of the cosmic heavenly forces that

³¹⁴ Bereshit 32:28. The author here (as well as the translation) follows the explanation given in Bereshit Rabbah 78:3 (Onkelos explains it differently here).

³¹⁵ Bereshit 32:25.

³¹⁶ Bereshit 32:31.

are striving to gain hegemony over all of existence. For example, when Leah was switched with Rachel, there was obviously a temptation to angrily protest and to get rid of her. He realized that it was his internal problem and he therefore did not try to solve it by the simple act of divorce. He struggled with himself to find a way to build his home from Leah who was also suddenly and unexpectedly thrust into his life. Yaakov later said of Reuven, "You are my strength and my initial vigor,"³¹⁷ since he was conceived from the very first drop of Yaakov's manly emission.³¹⁸ It was not easy to live in the Land of Canaan, where abominable immorality was rampant,³¹⁹ and to remain pure. That was the height of strength of character. Yaakov also lived with Lavan, the wicked, for many years and he still remained perfect in his Torah observance as our Sages say: "I lived with Lavan, but I continued to observe the 613 *mitzvot*."³²⁰ He lived in depraved societies, struggled with them and succeeded in rising above them.

Question: Why was the Divine ratification of his success in his battles given specifically here?

Answer: Yaakov was about to encounter his brother Esav.

³¹⁷ Bereshit 49:3.

³¹⁸ Yevamot 76a, Rashi on Bereshit 32:5.

³¹⁹ As was demonstrated by the crime perpetrated with Dinah (see Bereshit, chap. 34).

³²⁰ Rashi on Bereshit 32:5. Not only does the numerical value of the word "garti" (I lived) equal 613, the number of *mitzvot*, but the letters are the same as "Taryag," the letters used to represent the number "613."

What occurred there could be constructed as surrender and false flattery to superior forces. Yaakov's bowing to Esav and referring to him numerous times as "my lord" and "my master" looks as if he, out of weakness, had been defeated. There is therefore the Divine confirmation that Yaakov had not been subdued, he had actually won, but had used different tactics. He knew that he was responsible for the perpetuation of the ideals that he embodied and he saw that this could not be achieved by a frontal attack. Yaakov also prepared himself for battle, which he knew full well how to wage. He had conquered Shechem with "his sword and his bow."³²¹ There are occasions, however, when it is preferable to avoid clashes and to bow in apparent acquiescence while in fact continuing the struggle. By the same token, there are situations when no concessions should be made and one must stand and fight. Yaakov the great strategist used the appropriate tactics for each situation. He received Divine approval of all his forms of struggle. His physical battles and his spiritual ones, his encounters with human forces and with heavenly powers and his military campaigns and his apparent submission are all given Divine sanction.

5. The Displaced Tendon and the Rationale for *Mitzvot*

During the aforementioned struggle, the mysterious "man" dislocated Yaakov's hip-joint. The Torah then states that

³²¹ Bereshit 48:22.

Jews are therefore forbidden to eat this displaced sinew, i.e. the sciatic nerve and its branches, because it had been struck at the hip-socket.³²² Strange! Because once upon a time grandpa Yaakov had his thigh dislocated, Jews are forbidden to eat this part of the animal. Are the *mitzvot* milestones of our family's medical history!

The obligation to observe *mitzvot* began when we were commanded at Mt. Sinai via Moshe Rabbenu and not from the days of our forefathers.³²³ "It was promulgated at Sinai but written 'in its place,'³²⁴ i.e. it was mentioned in conjunction with the historical event to indicate the reason for the subsequent prohibition. The Gemara proves this fact from the verse that states, "therefore the Children of Israel and not the Children the Children of Yaakov refrain from eating the sciatic nerve."³²⁵ We were only called "the Children of Israel" at Sinai. The Rambam wrote:³²⁶ "Take note of a fundamental principle which is contained in this *mishnah* which states that: 'it [the sciatic nerve] was forbidden to be eaten from Sinai onwards.' This proves that all the prohibitions from which we refrain and all the commands which we observe

322 Bereshit 32:35.

323 This fact has legal implications whether a person who eats the sciatic nerve of a non-kosher animal has violated one or two prohibitions (Chullin 100b-101b). See also the Rambam's commentary on Mishnah' Chullin 7:6.

324 Mishnah Chullin 7:6 and our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah's Talks on Parashat Tazria (Vayikra, p. 103).

325 Bereshit 32:32.

326 Rambam's commentary on the Mishnah, Chullin 7:6.

are kept because G-d commanded us via Moshe Rabbenu at Mt. Sinai, and not on account of a Divine command to any earlier prophet....So we refrain from eating the sciatic nerve not because it was prohibited from the time of Yaakov Avinu, but because we were so commanded via Moshe Rabbenu."

It is true that we learn the *mitzvot* from Moshe Rabbenu, but we have inherited our national character and our traits from our forefathers. Hashem chose us from all the nations. This really means that he created us a special Nation with the qualities needed for us to perform our historic task.³²⁷ These qualities, however, were only potential and needed to be actualized through national historical events.³²⁸ The realization began with Avraham, who is described as one of Hashem's five special possessions that uniquely advance the goals of Creation.³²⁹ It continued through Yitzchak, Yaakov and finally in the iron furnace of Egypt where the molding of the Jewish national character was completed. The Torah given on Mt. Sinai explicitly revealed the hidden character that existed in the Jewish soul from the time of our forefathers.

327 Yeshayahu 43:21: "I have formed this Nation for Myself so they might declare My praise." Unlike human beings, G-d, foreseeing the future, creates things such that they will be suited to be chosen to perform His will in the world (translator).

328 See the Kuzari's discussion of the unfolding of the Divine Quality throughout his book (translator).

329 Avot 6:9.

Questions: If so, why wasn't the Torah given to our forefathers?

Answers: The purpose of the Torah is to uplift and sanctify an entire Nation and not just individuals. Individual progress is possible to a certain degree even without the Torah. Among the non-Jewish, who do not have the Torah, there are righteous gentiles³³⁰ and even holy people.³³¹ The Torah was given to the entire Nation for us to live a holy national life. The individuals also naturally improve, but this occurs because they are part of the collective whole which is advancing. The obligation to observe *mitzvot* therefore commenced at Mt. Sinai via Moshe Rabbenu, but our intrinsic connection to the *mitzvot* began with our forefathers, as the verse states: "The Torah that Moshe commanded us (in the name of G-d) is the heritage of the community of Yaakov."³³² The command started from Moshe but our inner suitability to observe them stems from our national Jewish character which we inherited from Yaakov our forefather. The Zohar says: "Moshe on the inside (internally) and Yaakov on the outside (externally)."³³³ "Moshe on the inside" - Moshe gave the *mitzvot* which revealed the inner Jewish soul, "Yaakov on the outside" – which was molded and ac-

³³⁰ See Rambam, Hilchot Melachim 8:11 (translator).

³³¹ See Rambam, Hilchot Shemittah Ve-Yovel 13:13 that any man in the world who dedicates his life to G-d can become a "most holy being." They can even reach Divine inspiration (Tanna De-vei Eliyahu Rabbah, chap. 9).

³³² Devarim 33:4.

³³³ Quoted in Olat Re'eiyah vol 1, p.100; vol. 2, p. 449.

tualized by the historical events that occurred to our forefathers. The Torah is the inner nature of the Jew and this nature is translated into practical reality by the historical events that befell our forefathers. These events are therefore themselves Torah and related at length in the torah. This is the meaning of the expression "the deeds of the forefathers are a sign of what will befall their descendants"³³⁴ – these events realized our potential abilities which then became our practical nature. We and our forefathers therefore act in a similar nature when in similar circumstances because we and them are the same. There is identity between the events of our forefathers and the mitzvot, because they are both expressions of the Jewish character. Each of the events of our forefathers thus has a parallel *mitzvah*. Yaakov's limping on account of the displaced tendon is thus not a chance event. It represents an essential element in our national character. It is "an inheritance of the community of Yaakov" and thus defines an element in our nature. Consequently, this event must also be reflected in the "Torah that Moshe commanded us" in the form of a *mitzvah* – "that the Jews must refrain from eating the sciatic nerve since it was dislocated in Yaakov."³³⁵

Question: Why is it reflected as a prohibition to eat a particular part of an animal? What do the animals have to do with Yaakov's experience?

334 Ramban on Bereshit 12:1 and in numerous other places.

335 Bereshit 32:25.

Answer: This question is not specific to this law but is relevant to many laws. For example, when a person becomes impure, his purification is affected by the sprinkling of the ashes of the red heifer. Furthermore, the unsolved murder of a wayfarer is atoned for by a decapitated calf. A goat is sent to *Azazel*³³⁶ as part of the atonement process on Yom Kippur for the sins of the Jewish People. It is evident that there is a connection between human existence and the animal kingdom. This is so because the whole of existence is a single organism referred to in Hebrew as the "Datzcham Unit."³³⁷ All these levels are interrelated and connected through hidden pathways. We and the animals are connected. This was very obvious in Noach's Ark where the whole remnant of the animal world was dependent on Noach. Therefore, an improvement in one part of this united whole, such as in the animal kingdom, can heal and improve another part of the organism, namely, man. This is just like a human being who takes a tablet in one part of the organism and yet it heals an entirely different limb, because the same vitality flows through all of the limbs and thus unites them. A frailty in Yaakov's thigh thus can be reflected in the prohibition to eat a certain limb in an animal.

336 A hard cliff (Rashi). See other commentators for alternative interpretations.

337 The word "Datzcham" is an acrostic standing for the four realms of existence: a. "Domem" – inanimate elements. b. "Tzome'ach" – vegetation. c. "Chai" – the animals. d. "Medaber" – the speaking being, i.e. humans (translator). See *Orot Ha-kodesh* 2, p. 361.

6. "And He Limped on His Hip"³³⁸

Yaakov's limping is an essential element of his makeup and we, the Jewish People, suffered similar woes throughout our history. The Nation of Israel has had to struggle with heavenly and human forces throughout the long dark night of human history. We cannot be vanquished, we are victorious but we pay a price. His and our stalwart erect stance is undermined and stoops throughout history. But we have not sunk to the level of Esav around whose thigh a snake is wound.³³⁹ Yaakov's thigh remains pure but is weakened and limping throughout his, our, history we have been subjected to ghastly tortures in successful attempts to subdue us, "But the Holy One Blessed Be He delivered us from them."³⁴⁰ The Ramban describes it as follows:³⁴¹ "This even [the dislocation of his hip] is a hint to Yaakov's offspring that there will be a generation when Esav [Rome] will prevail over us and will almost obliterate us."³⁴² This occurred in the generation of Rabbi Yehudah ben Bava³⁴³ and his companions

³³⁸ Bereshit 32:31.

³³⁹ See Targum Onkelos on Bereshit 25:27. This indicated that he possesses the evil qualities of the primordial snake (translated based on the Zohar brought and explained by the commentary on Targum Yonatan on Bereshit 25:27).

³⁴⁰ From the Pesach Haggadah (translator).

³⁴¹ In his commentary on Bereshit 32:26.

³⁴² Gid forbid. Complete annihilation is an impossibility as Hashem has promised us that we are an "eternal Nation. See Vayikra 26:44, Malachi 3:6 and a full discussion in the Rambam's Iggeret Teiman, p. 128 in the Mossad Ha-Rav Kook edition (translator).

³⁴³ He suffered martyrdom for giving Rabbinic ordination to his students, despite

who were Rabbis of the Mishnah...In this generation of religious persecution they would take iron balls, heat them until they were white hot and then place them under the arm-pits [of their torture victims] and thus burnt them to death.' And there are other generations in which they have done such things to us and even worse (a hint to the times of the Christian Inquisition)." Also in our final revival, the birth of our modern State of Israel which illuminates our horizons after 2,000 years of exile was proceeded by a horrific "limp" and satanic outrages unparalleled in history.

7. "And Yaakov Came in Peace"³⁴⁴

We, however, are not frightened by these blows because we are an indestructible Nation. This is intimated by the verse concerning the attacking angel which states: "And he [the angel] saw that he could not defeat him [Yaakov]."³⁴⁵ The eternal Jewish People can be injured and maimed but we are invincible and even eventually return to our perfectly healthy state. As the abovementioned Ramban concludes: "However, we have endured and come through it as hinted in the verse: 'And Yaakov came in peace.'"³⁴⁶

the Roman prohibition. He gave his life in order to continue the Rabbinic chain.

344 Bereshit 33:18.

345 Bereshit 32:26.

346 Bereshit 33:18. Complete and while, unblemished bodily, monetarily or spiritually in his Torah (see Rashi on this verse) (translator).

Haftarah for Parashat Vayishlach

The Decline of the West

[Ovadiah, chapter 1]

In this week's Haftarah we discover that the concept "The Decline of the West" did not originate with the German philosopher, Oswald Spengler, but with the prophet Ovadiah. The prophet obviously does not use the expression "the West," but employs a parallel term from the Hebrew tradition: "Edom." Esav is Edom, i.e. the father of the West. As Rashi explains (on Bereshit 36:43), one of Esav's princes, "Magdi'el," is Rome.

Based on the Tanachic-historical analysis of Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel, it may be that the early Christians were descendants of Edom, who were more-or-less forcibly converted to Judaism by King Herod, whose memory should be besmirched. But even if the genealogical relationship is questionable, it is the spiritual relationship that is important for this discussion, and our Sages clearly identify Edom with Western Culture.

According to our Sages, Ovadiah himself was a righteous convert, a descendant of Edom (Rashi to Ovadiah 1:1). He

knew exactly what he was talking about. In the single chapter he bequeathed to us, he relates the ultimate collapse of Edom: "A vision of Ovadiah: Thus said Hashem, G-d, about Edom...Arise, and let us rise up against her in battle. I have made you small among the nations. You are greatly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high, who says in his heart: who can bring me down to earth?...For on that day, says Hashem, I will cause the wise men of Edom to be lost, and understanding from the mountain of Esav...Because of your violence against your (i.e., Edom's) brother Yaakov, shame will cover you, and you will be cut off forever...You should not have looked on the day of your brother's misfortune, and you should not have rejoiced over the children of Yehudah on the day of their destruction" (Ovadiah 1:1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12).

If we return to the philosopher Oswald Spengler, we see that he was pessimistic, and rejected the idea of humanity's advancement. He arrogantly claimed that the Jewish Nation had completed its historical role and was in the process of disappearing from the earth's stage. He emphasized that there is an essential contrast between the Nation of Israel and the German nation – the latter being the point of Edom's sword. According to his opinion, there would be an unavoidable collision between the young German culture, rooted in its land, and the senile, cosmopolitan, homeless Jewish culture. But amazingly, as revealed each day before the nations of the world, the three-thousand year old

Nation, despite its suffering and Exile, has the youthfulness which allows it to be reborn in its Land, while Europe is in a process of dissolving and being consumed by despair.

The Decline of the West will occur not because human history will stumble, but on the contrary, because it will succeed.

VAYESHEV

1. Yosef's Capacity to Bring Blessing
2. Yosef's Nature
3. The Clash Between Yosef and His Brothers
4. Yosef's Leadership

1. Yosef's Capacity to Bring Blessing

After the pair of the Torah portions Vayetze and Vayishlach which dealt with our forefather Yaakov comes two Torah portions which discuss the sons. Among the sons, Yosef is conspicuous as an imposing personality. Yosef's special abilities are reflected in the blessings given to him by both Yaakov and Moshe, which surpass his brothers' blessings both in content and length. These blessings are sweeping and all encompassing: "[Yours will be] the blessing of heaven above and the blessings of the water lying beneath...[The Blessing will be] until the endless bounds of the world's hills... It [the blessing] will come upon the head of Yosef, on the brow of the elect of his brothers."³⁴⁷ "The

³⁴⁷ Devarim 33:16.

blessings of your father surpassed the blessing of my parents." Yaakov gave Yosef a greater than he himself received.³⁴⁸ Yosef was also split up into two tribes: Efraim and Menasheh. He was one of the sons but was treated like one of the forefathers in that both his sons were separate tribes. He possessed both the qualities of a forefather and of a son. Onkelos translates the word "even" (usually meaning "stone"), which describes Yosef, as a combination of two words "av – father" and "ben – son."³⁴⁹ He was both. Yaakov was aware of Yosef's numerous and diverse talents so he made him a coat of many colored strips. He was distinct in this way from his brothers, who only had coats of a single color indicating a specific talent for each one. Yosef was however all encompassing. Yosef himself also knew of his numerous talents. This showed up in his dreams which revealed his deepest thoughts. He dreamt: "And my sheaf stood erect, and your sheaves circled my sheaf and bowed down to it"³⁵⁰ and in a second dream: "And behold the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to me."³⁵¹ These dreams were expressions of economic leadership and success. The dreams were not vain or coincidental but were true and in fact materialized when Yosef was promoted to a top position of economic leadership.

348 See Ha-Amek Devar on Bereshit 49:26.

349 Onkelos on Bereshit 49:24.

350 Bereshit 37:7.

351 Bereshit 37:9.

2. Yosef's Nature

Yaakov, the "double man" (as explained in previous sections), received two blessings. He received Avraham's blessing to continue spiritualizing mankind, a task that Avraham himself had begun, and he also received Esav's blessing of conducting and bringing progress to the physical world. Esav's material task of supervising and improving the national, political, military, economic and organization aspects of the world was, for the time being, his responsibility. This two-sided man therefore had two wives – Rachel and Leah. Rachel constituted the visible, physical world, while Leah embodied the inner, spiritual world. Rachel's son, Yosef, inherited from her and from Yaakov the task of building and organizing life in the material world. Yosef was Esav's adversary.³⁵² He was able to tackle him because he had the very same characteristics that Esav possessed, but better. The culture and talents of the non-Jews could not compete with him. One of his sparks could consume them all.³⁵³

Yaakov was fully aware of Yosef's talents and so he "equipped" him appropriately. Our Sages interpret the verse: "because he was a wise son"³⁵⁴ – all that he [Yaakov] had learned from Shem and Ever, he taught him [Yosef]." The

352 Rashi on Bereshit 30:25.

353 Rashi on Bereshit 37:1.

354 Rashi on Bereshit 37:3. The verse is usually understood as "because he was the son of his old age," but our Rabbis explain the word "zekunim" as an abbreviation "zeh kanah chochmah – this one acquired wisdom."

wisdom of Shem and Ever is the universal human wisdom which is common to both us and the non-Jews. Shem and Ever were distinguished people, who had reached the peak of human culture and morality, and one could build a virtuous and moral world. This knowledge belonged to Yosef because his task was to build a virtuous and decent world. The mission of the other brothers was to elevate the inner spiritual content of existence and so they were engaged in the specific Jewish elements of the world which are above general world culture. Shem and Ever's wisdom was therefore transmitted to Yosef and not to them. Yosef's genius in arranging activities became apparent later on. This was his blessing and he thus succeeded in everything he did. When he was in the house of Potifar, it says: "His master realized that G-d was with him [Yosef] and that G-d granted success to everything he did."³⁵⁵ Later when in prison it says: "The prison warden placed all the prison inmates in Yosef's custody...The prison warden did not need to supervise anything that was in his charge since Hashem was with him, and whatever he did Hashem made successful."³⁵⁶ The climax of his successes was his appointment as viceroy of the king of Egypt. Egypt was the world power of the time (like Russia, America and Europe all together, today). Pharaoh, king of Egypt, was overwhelmed by Yosef's capacity and said: "There can be none with as much insight and wisdom

355 Bereshit 39:3.

356 Bereshit 39:22-23.

as you."³⁵⁷ Pharaoh in fact relinquished the task of managing public affairs and handed it over to Yosef, as it says: "by your command shall the whole nation act." It does say: "I shall outrank you on my throne," but in fact he remains "honorary president," while Yosef ruled the land for all practical purposes.

3. The Clash Between Yosef and His Brothers

There was continuous and mutual antagonism between Yosef and his brothers. Yosef brought "bad reports" about them.³⁵⁸ His dream revealed his criticism of his brothers. "We were binding sheaves in the field when my sheaf suddenly stood up and remained erect. Your sheaves formed a circle around my sheaf and bowed down to it."³⁵⁹ My sheaf stood upright ready for action while yours stooped sluggishly. He accused them of inaction and ignorance of the practical world. They also have complaints against him. Yehudah charged him: "You are just like Pharaoh,"³⁶⁰ i.e. "you are just another Pharaoh and are only involved in the material side of life!" They suspected that his only concern was the physical arrangement of the world, which is the task of the non-Jews, not of the Jews; while he was neglecting

357 Bereshit 41:40.

358 Bereshit 37:2.

359 Bereshit 37:7.

360 Bereshit 44:18.

our special Jewish mission of building the inner spirituality of the world.

The brothers sensed that Yosef was starting something new. He had the coat of many colors, showing that he incorporated all the different talents and he therefore outstripped them. This man slandered them to their father and was causing a rift in the Jewish Nation. He was dangerous and destructive to the unity of the "House of Israel." They remembered full well the refining process that the family had undergone in which Yishmael was rejected while Yitzchak remained and Esav was rejected while Yitzchak remained. They reflected: "Is this processing continuing? Will someone be weeded out now? Yosef called them and said: "Listen to the dream that I had,³⁶¹ I want you to know who I am." They knew exactly who he was but wanted to clarify the point. "Do you want to be our king? Do you intend to rule over us?"³⁶² "Do you mean to consult with us or is your plan to dominate us as a dictator?"³⁶³ "If you intend to consult with us okay, but if you intend to lord over us – it's a no go!" They were at loggerheads, it was either them or Yosef. It could not be both. The issue was through whom the Jewish People would continue: the brothers or Yosef.

³⁶¹ Bereshit 37:6.

³⁶² Bereshit 37:8.

³⁶³ The Hebrew root of the word "king" and "consult" is the same (malach) and it implies with consideration and consultation, while the Hebrew root for "rule" (mashal) simply means to hand out orders.

Sibling rivalry and clashes did not commence with this dispute. It had been preceded by strife between Kayin and Hevel, Yitzchak and Yishmael and Esav and Yaakov. It is true that there are numerous explanations of these interpersonal clashes and of national conflicts. Some are based on economic considerations, others on class tensions and still others on psycho-sexual problems, etc... Our Sages were fully aware of all these interpretations, and in fact the Midrash brings a dispute concerning the cause of Kayin and Hevel's quarrel. One view is that both of them claimed the right to have the second female twin that was born with Hevel (a psycho-sexual interpretation). Another view is that the dispute was over the division of the earth's resources between them (an economic interpretation).³⁶⁴ However, the deep-rooted reason that caused the quarrel over these issues was their fundamental difference in nature, a clash at the deepest point of their inner essence. Their diverse qualities suited them for entirely different tasks in the world. The visible reasons for the quarrel were only superficial manifestations of a far deeper dispute. This is also true of the jealousy over the coat of many colors. The brothers were not kindergarten children who wanted a beautiful piece of colored silk. Yosef's talent made him competent to arrange and order the world but this clashed with the character of his brothers who were befitted to correct and improve the inner forces of the world. Yaakov, by giving Yosef the coat of many colors, had

³⁶⁴ These views and others are brought in Bereshit Rabbah 22:7.

indicated that of all the brothers, Yosef had been chosen to lead the clan.

4. Yosef's Leadership

Question: Why wasn't Yosef's authority accepted?

Answer: A true leader is one who encompasses and includes all the qualities, thoughts and aspirations of the people led by him. For example, the "leader of ten"³⁶⁵ contains all the qualities of the souls of the ten people under him. That is why these people accept his rule over them. They know that he feels and understands them and will thus faithfully represent their aspirations. If this is not the case, the people under his tutelage will not accept his rule. The brothers did not accept Yosef's kingship because he did not represent or express their special makeup and task in the world. Yosef capably organized the physical world to function honestly and properly, but he was unable to perform their task of building up the spiritual content of the world. Yosef did not embody their world and thus could not lead them.

Question: Why wasn't Yehudah chosen to be the leader?

Answer: To a minor degree, Yehudah did serve as a leader.³⁶⁶ However, for the moment, he did not possess

³⁶⁵ Discussed in Shemot 18:21-23.

³⁶⁶ This is seen in Bereshit 37:27 where it says: "And the brothers heeded him [Yehudah]." Also in Bereshit 44:18, he took the initiative to argue with Yosef for Binyamin as it says: "And Yehudah approached him [Yosef]."

Yosef's practical talent. Only in the days of King David and later in the days of the *Mashiach ben David* are the practical and spiritual talents harmoniously united in one person.

Question: If Yosef and Yehudah were both capable leaders in their respective fields, why was it so important to ensure that Yosef ruled first?

Answer: Because the appropriate order in building the world is firstly the structuring of the material world and only afterwards the build-up of the spiritual world. The *Mashiach ben Yosef* precedes and paves the way for the *Mashiach ben David*. In the final analysis, however, it became clear that both these forces are essential and that they complement each other. Yosef and his brothers embraced each other cried and kissed each other: "And he [Yosef] kissed each of his brothers and wept on them."³⁶⁷ The full stature of the "House of Israel" will only be built when the two forces unite in harmony.

³⁶⁷ Bereshit 45:15.

Haftarah for Parashat Vayeshev – Chanukah

Not by Might and Not by Power

[Zechariah 2:14-4:7]

The famous verse of the prophet Zechariah: "Not by might and not by power but by My spirit, says Hashem of Hosts" (Zechariah 4:6), seems rather strange. After all, human history has proven through countless examples that spirit alone is not enough. On the contrary! The weapon is the deciding factor of events, and even directs their evolution.

So isn't this a pretty naïve stance? In the verse itself the Master of the Universe, who is the Source of the message to Zerubavel, is called "Hashem of Hosts," i.e. of armies! Did Zerubavel, the prince of the Jews who led the return to Israel after the Babylonian Exile, only utilize spiritual means, or did he also employ a strategy on the ground? Didn't he take pains to build the Temple (Ezra 3-4)? Even when the King of Persia ordered the Jews to cease building, didn't they continue to do so without his permission (ibid. 5)?

Furthermore, against their enemies' threats (ibid. 4:5), those new immigrants initiated rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem

(Nechemiah 2:17). It is related regarding those enemies: "And all of them joined together to fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it" (ibid. 4:2). The response of the Jews was not only spiritual: "And we prayed to our G-d and stood on guard against them day and night because of them" (ibid. v. 3).

Those enemies, different non-Jews who dwelled in our Land during our absence in the time of Babylonian Exile and who toyed with the idea that this Land belongs to them, continued planning their pogroms (ibid. v. 5). The Jews responded with strength to protect themselves: "I stationed the Nation according to family with their swords, spears and bows" (ibid. v. 7).

All of this military preparation did not slow down the rebuilding of the wall. "And from that day, half of my young men did the work and half of them held the spears, shields, bows and coats of mail" (ibid. v. 10). It was an inspiring sight: "Those who build the wall and those who carried the burden arranged it so that he did the work with one of his hands and held a weapon with the other. And each of the builders had his sword girded by his side" (ibid. v. 11-12). Doesn't this picture fill us with incredible pride?

Since this is the Haftarah of Chanukah, we ask the question: did the Hasmoneans defeat the Greeks through spirit alone, without the use of force? And doesn't the Torah itself direct us to use weapons when there is no other way to protect our independence? It commands us numerous times to ar-

range military censuses: "From twenty years and up, everyone who goes to the army in Israel" (Bemidbar 1:3).

There is therefore a clear misunderstanding in the reading of our verse. In truth, the verse does not say: "Not by might and not by power but by spirit" but rather "but by My spirit." What is worthless is might and power detached from the word of Hashem - violence for its own sake, power as its own ideal. Everything must be illuminated by faith in Hashem, by the most pure ethical standards.

When Nechemiah established defensive units surrounding Jerusalem, he charged them: "Do not be afraid of them. Remember, Hashem, who is great and awe-inspiring, and wage war for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives and your houses" (Nechemiah 4:8). The Rambam, the great halachic authority of the laws of war, emphasizes that a soldier must wage war out of a faith in Hashem (Hilchot Melachim, end of chapter 7).

Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook, never missed an opportunity to be present at the great Tzahal military parade on Yom Ha-Atzmaut. Each time a tank, weapon or army unit passed him, he recited the verse: "Some trust in chariots and horses, but we will mention the Name of Hashem our G-d" (Tehillim 20:8), but he would immediately add the beginning of the verse: "Through chariots and horses," i.e. we rely on Hashem, but this reliance expresses itself in an active manner, through our military efforts.

The Hasmoneans also acted through deep faith, and therefore their small military force with limited weapons succeeded in crushing the powerful Greek army. This is true in our time as well. "The secret weapon of the Israel Defense Force" is morale, faith, the inner conviction that we are fighting for a just cause, and our connection to Hashem – whether all of Israel is aware of it or not.

MIKETZ

1. Pharaoh's Dream
2. The Dream's Interpretation: Yosef - the Antithesis of Egypt
3. Yosef – "Avrech"
4. Yosef - Yehosef

1. Pharaoh's Dream

"After two years had elapsed, Pharaoh dreamt."³⁶⁸ What is the psychological basis of dreams? One psychological school holds that dreams are negative repressed desires that break out of the subconscious.³⁶⁹ When awake a person manages to suppress his murky desires into the subconscious, but when asleep the "censor" is also asleep and these shady desires surface. As distinct from that psychological approach, our holy Rabbi, the Rambam, gives the Jewish view which is the exact opposite explanation³⁷⁰: during the day, when a person is busy with worldly affairs, he is flooded with all types of stimuli and confusions of life, which he encounters

³⁶⁸ Bereshit 41:1.

³⁶⁹ Freud.

³⁷⁰ Moreh Nevuchim 2:37.

and which is forced to deal, and his true desires are pushed into a corner. When nighttime descend, the activities subside and he is able to rest from his toil, his inner thoughts and exalted aspiration are then revealed. He is free to think about this true thoughts, inner personality and his role in life.

Pharaoh had an economic dream: he dreamt about food.³⁷¹ This was his primary preoccupation. As the king, he was responsible for an economically viable state. This was his major concern while awake and it thus surfaced in his dreams. Everyone was dreaming about food and economic existence. Yosef dreamt about sheaves of wheat,³⁷² the Chief Butler and the Chief Baker dreamt about wine and bread³⁷³ and finally Pharaoh himself dreamt about human nourishment.³⁷⁴ Egypt was in dire economic straits. The economic ministers, the Chief Butler and the Chief Baker had been imprisoned. All this occurred a short time after Yosef had been deposed from his position as "director-general" of the Chief Butler's household. Since then, matters had been deteriorating. The former economic staff had been dismissed and incarcerated, new ministers had been appointed but all to no avail. Pharaoh was therefore very worried and his concern showed up in his dreams and even on awakening "in the morning his spirit was agitated."³⁷⁵

371 Bereshit 41:1.

372 Bereshit 37:7.

373 Bereshit 40:9, 16.

374 Bereshit 40:1.

375 Bereshit 41:8.

2. The Dream's Interpretation – Yosef, the Antithesis of Egypt

Pharaoh was deeply perturbed, "So he sent and summoned all the necromancers of Egypt, and all its wise men. Pharaoh related his dream to them but none could provide [a satisfactory] interpretation for Pharaoh."³⁷⁶ "There were some who interpreted the dreams, but 'not for Pharaoh,' i.e. these words were unacceptable to him and he found no satisfaction in their interpretations. Some said: you will have seven daughters but you will bury all seven. [Others said:] you will conquer seven states but they will rebel against you."³⁷⁷ Pharaoh did not accept these interpretations because he sensed that his dreams were not a private matter about daughters nor even a transient national matter of subduing other countries. He felt that they were a portent of a fundamental revolution in the whole of Egyptian life. But no such interpretation was forthcoming. This is rather puzzling because Yosef's explanation was so simple and logical. It was well known that the Nile was the source of Egyptian livelihood and the sheaves and cows could easily be interpreted in this content. Why didn't the necromancers think of this possibility?

Our Sages hint that there were in fact magicians that knew the solution but they were afraid to present it because it in-

³⁷⁶ Bereshit 41:8.

³⁷⁷ Bereshit Rabbah 89:6 - most of which is also brought in Rashi on Bereshit 41:8.

volved a drastic revolution in Egyptian ideology. It involved an upheaval in all the basic axioms, and therefore would be unpalatable to Egypt. The Nile was the pivotal point of the Egyptian faith. The Nile was flooding and ebbing according to the tides and watered Egypt on an exact periodic basis. After learning the tide cycles, the Egyptians planned all their lives accordingly. They learned to harness these regular natural states for their agricultural benefit. Their lives then became dominated by these natural states. Since the Nile was the source of their livelihood, it became their god. They also had another god who was in control of good and evil and spiritual matters, but for them there was no connection between economic successes and good and evil. The world of morality and the physical world were controlled by completely unrelated forces.

Then there was a dream about seven years of famine "that there would be no way to even know that there had once been a former abundance."³⁷⁸ This terrified them. What had happened to the regular flooding? Where was nature – god? The Egyptians were unable to interpret and draw the conclusion from the dream because it contradicted their whole ideology and faith. They could not accept it.³⁷⁹ Within the

378 Bereshit 41:31. This means that not only would the previous surplus be forgotten but even after deep investigation, it would be impossible to discover that there was even an abundance (translator).

379 This is similar to what happened in Russia in our times. The Russians refused to accept Mendel's Laws of Heredity because they contradicted their ideology of absolute equality. Mendel showed that there were inherent racial

realm of Egyptian concept, there was no solution to the dream. Yosef therefore had to come from the outside. Yosef was an "Ivri" meaning "of the other side," i.e. beyond the Egyptian world of concepts. He was a descendant of *Avraham Avinu*, about whom our Sages said, "that the whole world was on one side while he stood [out against them] on the other side."³⁸⁰ So Yosef, with this different conceptual world, has to be the one to reveal to them that: "What G-d is about to do He has revealed to Pharaoh."³⁸¹ There is a Divine power beyond nature and in control of nature. Nature is not an independent force. The all-powerful, spiritual G-d, the G-d of good and evil is Hashem³⁸² is also the G-d of the forces of nature.³⁸³ There are not two separate worlds: a material one and a spiritual one. There is one united world in which good and evil and material successes are inter-dependent; just as the Torah asserts in numerous places such as "If you heed my commandments... then I will provide the first and last rain of your Land at its proper time."³⁸⁴ There is one G-d of the entire universe, and the world of nature and the moral world are united under His mastery.

differences. They proceeded to plan their agriculture on their false theories and naturally suffered catastrophic results.

380 Bereshit Rabbah 42:8.

381 Bereshit 41:28.

382 Designated by the unpronounceable Hebrew letters Y-H-V-H.

383 Designated in Hebrew by the name "Elohim."

384 Devarim 11:13-14. Similarly in Vayikra (26:4) it states, "If you follow My laws...then I will give your rains in their time."

When Pharaoh heard the interpretation, he underwent a spiritual transformation. He recognized the existence of an Almighty G-d and said: "Can there be anyone else who has G-d's spirit in him as this man does?...Since G-d has informed you about all this, there can be no one with as much insight and wisdom as you."³⁸⁵ His new found faith in G-d led him to recognize Yosef's superior talents and strengths and thus he in effect relinquished his kingship in favor of Yosef when he said: "You shall be in charge of my palace and my nation will obey your word implicitly"³⁸⁶ (Egyptologists speak of an Egyptian "heretic-king" who believed in one god.³⁸⁷ They claim however that he learned our monotheism from him while in truth the opposite occurred as related here).

3. Yosef – "Avrech"³⁸⁸

Pharaoh publicly installed Yosef as ruler of Egypt: "He had him [Yosef] ride in his second royal chariot and they proclaimed before him 'Avrech'!"³⁸⁹ What is the meaning of this title? The Targum Onkelos interprets it as "father (i.e. coun-

³⁸⁵ Bereshit 41:38-39.

³⁸⁶ Bereshit 41:40.

³⁸⁷ Amenophis IV, who changed his name to Akhnaton, abolished the multitude of Egyptian deities and enforced the worship of one god – the sun Aton. He ruled for eighteen years during the XVIII Dynasty (translator).

³⁸⁸ Bereshit 41:43.

³⁸⁹ Bereshit 41:43.

selor) to the king."³⁹⁰ Yosef is the spiritual father, the source of the Divine ideals and culture of the king. He is above the king. Once the king is affiliated with and guided by holy principles, he can then set about organizing and arranging the practical aspects of existence virtuously and properly. Rabbi Yehudah explained the word as a combination of two words "Av" meaning that he is a "father" of wisdom despite being only "Rach" – "tender" and "young" in age. Older people generally have the advantage of wisdom and experience, but they lack the dynamic energy of youth. With the youth, the situation is reversed. There is a popular saying: "If only the elderly 'could' and the young 'understood.'" The ideal situation is when these two forces, wisdom and capability, are present in one person. Yosef was a "young-elder": as wise as an older person and full of youthful vigor. This explanation is similar in certain respects to the first one. The Midrash brings a third opinion:³⁹¹ "The son of Durmaskit said to him [Rabbi Yehudah]: How much longer will you pervert the meaning of the verses of the Torah? The word 'avrech' can only be connected to the word 'bircayim' (knees – meaning bending the knee before him in homage) for all came in and went out only by his permission, as it states, 'And he set him over all the land of Egypt.'"³⁹² The masses could not comprehend Yosef's stature as explained by Rabbi

390 "Rach" in Aramaic means "king" (translator).

391 Sifrei Devarim and brought in Rashi here.

392 This is the continuation of the verse immediately after the word "avrech" (translator).

Yehudah. He was an incomprehensible, super-natural phenomenon to them, and they thus bent their knee and succumbed to him as if he was a Divine power (This is similar to what the Christians do when they ascribe Divine attributes to "that man,"³⁹³ the son of a man named Yosef). This interpretation is based on people's attitude to Yosef, while the earlier explanations were descriptions of his essence.

4. Yosef - Yehosef

Yosef's appointment aroused a commotion in governmental circles. "When Pharaoh said: 'without your permission no man shall lift his hand or foot in the land of Egypt'³⁹⁴ – Pharaoh's astrologers protested: 'Do you intend that a slave who was bought for twenty pieces of silver should rule over us!' He answered them: 'I can see royal characteristics in him.' They answered: 'If so, he must know all the seventy languages [of mankind].' Gavriel (the angel) came and [tried] to teach him, but [Yosef] could not learn. [Gavriel] added a letter from the name of The Holy One Blessed Be He to his name. He then succeeded in learning them:³⁹⁵ 'He set it as a testimony in Yehosef'³⁹⁶ when he went out over the land of Egypt, saying, I heard a language unknown to

393 The founder of Christianity, Yeshu, called "Yoshka Pandrei" in Yiddish (translator).

394 Bereshit 41:44.

395 Tehillim 81:6.

396 The "H" is the added letter.

me."³⁹⁷ Understanding a nation's language means to understand its mentality. To be able to save the non-Jews, one has to understand their makeup. Yosef and the non-Jews have in common that they both are involved in fashioning and building the physical world. To prevent world culture from degenerating into vice and depravity, Yosef had to understand all the nuances and shades of world civilization. Only then would he be able to improve the world and to structure it on moral principles. To fulfill this task, Yosef had to spiritually "upgrade" and Gavriel was sent for this purpose. Gavriel is the quality of strength and power.³⁹⁸ Yosef needed the power to take infinite and lofty ideals and to implant them into the finite world down to the minutest details. Justice as meted out by the courts, for example, involves the contraction and application of the ideal and absolute righteousness down to the pettiest dispute. In order to acquire this talent of introducing the Divine illumination into the world and all its seventy nations he had to have an "H" added to his name, so he was called "Yehosef." The Gemara³⁹⁹ quotes a verse from Yeshayahu⁴⁰⁰ which it interprets to mean: "Hashem created the worlds with the letters 'yud' and 'hey.'" The World to Come was created with the letter "yud" while this world was created with the letter "hey." This is the name of G-d that is manifest in this world. Yosef

397 Sotah 36b.

398 Gavriel is derived from the Hebrew word for valor or strength.

399 Menachot 29b.

400 Yeshayahu 26:4.

is in fact "Yeho-sof"⁴⁰¹ – meaning that he is able to make the name of G-d that appears in this world, reach its absolute and ultimate manifestation down to the smallest nooks and crannies and in every minute detail of existence. He was not only "great," possessing lofty holiness, but he was also "strong" in that he was able to make the Divine light appear in everything and everywhere.

Yehudah's name, however, has all the four letters of Hashem's name⁴⁰² with the addition of the letter "dalet" in the middle,⁴⁰³ indicating the four points of the compass which represent this world. Yehudah was in charge of improving the spiritual aspects of existence, which is in fact the specific task of the whole Jewish People. Yosef was at the interface between us and the non-Jews and his task was therefore to base the practical world on Divine ideals and to introduce G-d's name into the physical world.

401 "Sof" in Hebrew means "end" or "ultimate."

402 The letters Yud, Hey, Vav, Hey. It is forbidden to pronounce the name on account of its holiness (translator).

403 The Hebrew letter "dalet" has the numerical value of four.

Haftarah for Parashat Miketz

Do Not Divide the Child

[Melachim 1 3:15-4:1]

"Please, my master, give her the living child and do not murder him" (Melachim 1 3:26). This plea, expressed during King Shlomo's famous case, also applies on a national level relating to the grown child which is the Nation of Israel. This was the opinion of Maran Ha-Rav Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of the Nation of Israel which is reviving in its Land.

The Nation of Israel has already been torn between two streams for two hundred years: the religious and the secular. In Hungary, when the non-religious majority of the Board of the Jewish Communities threatened to crush Torah-loyal Jews through its decisions, the later decided to establish an independent representative organization. The supporters of forming separate communities certainly loved their wayward brothers, but when there was no choice, they decided to disengage from them.

To what is this similar? To a ship hit by a bomb. Water is bursting inside, and the ship is beginning to sink. The captain therefore gives an order to close the sealed barriers to

prevent the water from entering the entire ship. He is sacrificing the sailors trapped on the other side with this decision in order to save the entire ship. This seems logical, but in the case of separate communities, this was not the opinion of all Rabbis.

For example, several years later, the famed leader, Ha-Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch took a similar stance in Frankfurt on the Main River and ruled that from a halachic perspective people were obligated to belong to the small separate community which he established. But a much greater halachic authority, Ha-Rav Yitzchak Dov Bamberger of Wurtzburg, disagreed with him with all forcefulness, and ruled that people were obligated to remain within the larger community which included both G-d-fearing and secular Jews. This was also the opinion of the Netziv, Ha-Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, the great Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin in Lithuania. For him, establishing a separate community was tantamount to inserting a sword into the flesh of the Nation (Shut Meishiv Davar #44).

This brings us back to Maran Ha-Rav Kook who formulated this idea with painful doubt: "There is a difference of opinion concerning communal direction at this time, because of the increase of rebels who raise the banner of anarchy with a strong hand. Is it proper to divide the Nation so that the righteous who raise the banner of Hashem's Name will have no association with those transgressors who cast off the yoke [of Torah] or perhaps the power of communal peace out-

weighs all?" (Orot, Orot Ha-Techiyah 20). According to his opinion, these two positions are represented by the two women who stood before King Shlomo. In order to clarify who is the true mother the king in his wisdom created the test of the sword: "Bring me a sword...Divide the living child in two, and give half to one and half to the other" (Melachim 1 3:24-25). The imposter mother says: "Divide it" (26). In deep despair, she reveals her tendency for personal destruction: "Let it be neither mine nor yours, divide it" (ibid.). The true mother, full of natural mercy, yells: "Give her the living child and do not murder him" (ibid.). "There is no end to the physical and spiritual evils of dividing the Nations into sections," Maran Ha-Rav Kook emphasized. But he immediately added: "Complete separation designed by cruel manipulators is impossible and will never come to pass" (ibid.). A child cut to pieces is a dead child. A divided Nation is in a life-threatening situation. We recognize the cost of separation. The civil war, the division of the Kingdom of Israel, caused the destruction of both kingdoms and the Exile.

We now love unity, and we are willing to guard it with great patience. The numerous serious differences of opinion today wound our Nation. But we know how to solve them without dividing the Nation. We must always remember that what connects us is infinitely more important than what divides us. We will break the sword which is waved by all extremists from any stream who seeks to separate us based on their ideologies. The child will never be divided – he will live.

VAYIGASH

1. Yosef's Talent
2. The Different Qualities of the *Mashiach ben Yosef* and the *Mashiach ben David*

1. Yosef's Talent

In this *parashah*, we again encounter Yosef's organizational talent. It reached its peak as he rearranged the agrarian and economic policy of the Egyptian kingdom. Since Egypt was the pivotal point of the ancient world, this amounted to changing the entire economic structure of the time. The Torah elaborates in detail on all the economic steps taken by Yosef during those depressed years. He accumulated all the money in Egypt, he bartered food in exchange for all the Egyptian livestock, he bought their land in exchange for food, he transferred the people to the cities and imposed a system of taxation.

Question: Why does the Torah inform us of all the intricacies of Egyptian agriculture? What difference does it make to us?

Answer: It is of great import because we see that Yosef created a just and equitable state of affairs. The economic and social significance of Yosef's actions was that all means of production were nationalized and then justly and equally redistributed. Firstly, he collected all the money, then all the cattle and finally all the land. He abolished private ownership. After nationalizing all means of production, he moved the people into the cities, thus breaking up the clan framework and creating a new socio-economic structure. Yosef then distributed the means of production that he had acquired to the people for their livelihood. He devised a progressive of their produce was handed over to the king while the rest remained as ample sustenance for their families. The Egyptian masses, deeply grateful for this new order, praised Yosef by saying: "You have saved our lives."⁴⁰⁴ The Egyptians for their part were willing to forgo their freedom and to completely submit themselves to the king so they suggested: "Let us, with our land, be serfs to Pharaoh."⁴⁰⁵ Yosef did not accept their advice because slavery was contrary to his plan for social justice and therefore, "Yosef bought [only] the land of Egypt for Pharaoh."⁴⁰⁶

In order to achieve ones goals one has to wait for a ripe opportunity. Had Yosef tried to introduce his innovations, at a time of plenty when private property was flourishing, it

404 Bereshit 47:25.

405 Bereshit 47:19.

406 Bereshit 47:20.

would have been foiled because of fierce opposition. He was aware of this and thus waited for the right moment to realize his vision of social and economic justice.

Yaakov Avinu acted the same way with Esav. He knew that chronologically Esav was the firstborn but he also knew that it was he, Yaakov and not Esav, who was destined to perform the firstborn's mission of building the spiritual basis of the world. But to confront Esav and request the birthright would definitely not work, so he bided his time. One day Esav arrived home from hunting famished and exhausted. He said to Yaakov: "Fill me up with that red stuff."⁴⁰⁷ This was the ideal opportunity to accomplish his plan for true justice. The ways of the world are tortuous and complicated and they are strewn with obstacles that prevent truth from emerging smoothly. The man of virtue has to "follow"⁴⁰⁸ events waiting to seize the opportunity when circumstances are ripe, to illuminate the world with truth and to establish practical procedure for its accomplishment.

2. The Different Qualities of the *Mashiach ben Yosef* and the *Mashiach ben David*⁴⁰⁹

Yosef was unparalleled in his capacity to build the material ba-

407 Bereshit 25:29. Yaakov had cooked a lentil stew (translator).

408 The Hebrew word "la'akov - to follow" is the same root as Yaakov's name (translator).

409 The Messiah who is descended from Yosef paves the way for the Messiah who is descended from David.

sis of existence. This talent of the *Messiah ben Yosef* continued to unfold throughout history. It did not begin with Yosef and it did not cease with his passing. Avraham Avinu had already displayed this ability in his victorious war against the four kings,⁴¹⁰ in his successful discovery of fresh water in a well he had dug⁴¹¹ and in his great economic prosperity with his flock, silver and gold.⁴¹² This talent became apparent in Yitzchak also when he dug wells, and was blessed with an unexpectedly prolific crop, a hundred-fold more than others.⁴¹³ It reached its peak with Yosef as the viceroy of Egypt. Yosef's descendants demonstrated the same expertise. Two hundred thousand⁴¹⁴ of his resourceful offspring from the tribe of Efraim broke out of slavery and left Egypt earlier than the rest of the Nation.⁴¹⁵ Later, G-d chose Yehoshua of the tribe of Efraim to perform the miracle of halting the sun in its tracks.⁴¹⁶ Yehoshua became famous for this act. Shaul established both the army and the kingdom as a forerunner

410 Bereshit, chap. 14.

411 Bereshit 21:25 where we first hear about this well when he rebukes Avimelech for allowing his servants to steal it (translator).

412 Bereshit 13:2.

413 Bereshit 26:12.

414 This is the reading in many sources including Targum Yonatan (Shemot 17:1), Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer (chap. 48), Mechilta (Beginning of Parashat Beshalacho and hence seems to be the principle reading. Other midrashim however have different numbers: 30,000; 180,000, 300,000. See the sources brought in Shemot Rabbah (20:11) (translator).

415 Shemot Rabbah 20:11.

416 Yehoshua 10:12.

of the permanent kingdom of the Davidic line.⁴¹⁷ Yoravam, an offspring of Yosef, was appointed as chief tax-collector of all the House of Yosef during King Shlomo's rule and finally became the king of Israel after the splitting of the Kingdom.⁴¹⁸ Maran (our revered teacher) Ha-Rav Kook wrote that in these times of our national re-awakening, Herzl was a spark of the *Mashiach ben Yosef* and he was thus a driving force for the rebuilding of our national entity.⁴¹⁹ Unfortunately, this spark is dimming because its connection with the *Mashiach ben David* is weakening.

417 Shmuel 1 14:47-52. Although Shaul was not a descendant of Yosef, he belonged to the Tribe of Binyamin and he thus had the same mother (Rachel) and father (Yaakov) as Yosef (translator).

418 Melachim 1 11:28-31.

419 In his eulogy for Herzl called "The Eulogy in Yerushalayim," published in Ma'amrei Ha-Re'iyah, p. 98.

Haftarah for Parashat Vayigash

A United Nation

[Yechezkel 37:15-28]

We are a Nation who loves unity and hates dispute. To our great distress, we have been torn apart by dissention for a long time. In our Haftarah, the prophet Yechezkel comes to comfort us: "Harmony will return. The word of Hashem came to me, saying: Now you, son of man, take for yourself one piece of wood and write upon it 'For Yehudah and for the Children of Israel, his comrades,' and take one piece of wood and write upon it 'For Yosef, the Tribe of Ephraim and all the House of Israel, his comrades.' Bring them close to you, one to the other, like one piece of wood, and they will become united in your hand. When the children of your people say to you, saying: 'Will you not tell us what these things are to you,' say to them, 'Thus said Hashem G-d: Behold, I am taking the wood of Yosef which is in the hand of Ephraim and the tribes of Israel, his comrades, and I am placing them and him together with the wood of Yehudah; and I will make them into one piece of wood, and they will become one in My hand'" (Yechezkel 37:15-19).

The terrible divide between Yosef and his brothers ended after numerous evils. The father's beloved son, a young genius who absorbed only theoretical wisdom, inherited his brothers' criticism for himself: "Yosef brought a bad report to their father" (Bereshit 37:2). Fearing that they would be pushed out, as happened to Yishmael and Esav, the brothers make the horrible decision to assassinate Yosef, but before doing so engage in the lesser evil of selling him into slavery. We have to admit that love and understanding did not reign in Yaakov's house.

As is known, there were continuing disputes during the course of our history between the descendant of Yehudah and the descendant of Ephraim. After King Shaul's death, the war of inheritance continued to rage between David, a descendant of Yehudah, and the inheritors of Shaul, the descendants of Binyamin. After King Shlomo's reign, the kingdom split into two Jewish States: the Kingdom of Yehudah and the Kingdom of Israel.

The civil wars between these two groups were numerous, and their fundamental fraternity did not prevent blood from flowing. The Nation of Israel paid dearly for war between Achaz, King of Yehudah, and Pekach ben Remalyahu, King of Israel, in which one hundred and twenty thousand soldiers from Yehudah fell on the cursed battlefield (Divrei Ha-Yamim 2 28:6). In the end, both kingdoms were exiled, one after the other.

There is room to believe that all of the suffering of the joint

exile would bring them closer together, but this is only partially true. And there is certainly room to expect that the return to Israel would be accompanied by reconciliation, but things are not so simple. A new dispute appeared between the Secular Zionists and the Ultra-Orthodox, or in the terminology of 120 years ago – the new settlement and the old settlement. The Zionists worked for the sake of the national revival of the Jewish Nation in its Land, while the Ultra-Orthodox were interested solely in faithful observance to the laws of the Torah. Intense mutual enmity reigned between the two camps and no less severe was their separation due to of lacking of caring and a big dose of misunderstanding.

In his eulogy for Dr. Theodore Herzl, Maran Ha-Rav Kook explained that these two streams are spiritual descendants of Yosef – a man of standing, statesmanship and economic wisdom – and Yehudah – a holy person responsible for the inner treasures of the Nation of Israel. According to his opinion, a spark of Mashiach ben David (Messiah, descendant of David, who is from the line of Yehudah) is hidden within the Ultra-Orthodox and a spark of Mashiach ben Yosef (Messiah, descendant of Yosef) is hidden within the Zionists (see Sukkah 52a-b for a discussion of the two Messiahs). The premature death of Theodore Herzl, the great leader of Zionism, contains to some extent the death of Mashiach ben Yosef following his severance from Mashiach ben David. Maran Ha-Rav Kook emphasized that this dichotomy is a disaster for both camps, and it is essential that everyone

work for the sake of national unity. Detached from religion, the Zionist movement will find itself as a body without a soul. And Faith without a base in historical reality will turn into a virtual floating in air (Ma'amrei Ha-Re'eiyah, pp. 94-99). Today we can rejoice because we have progressed in the right direction of bring these ideals together - but much work still remains to be done

We now find ourselves in the final battle and we are not so distant from a joyous tomorrow: "And speak to them: Thus said Hashem G-d: Behold, I am taking the Children of Israel from among the nations to which they have gone, and I will gather them from all around and bring them to their soil. I will make them into a single nation in the Land in the mountains of Israel's hills, and a single king will be king for them all; and they shall no longer be two nations, no longer divided into two kingdoms again" (Yechezkel 37:21-22).

Haftarah for Parashat Vayechi

A Strange Will

[Melachim 1 2:1-12]

Before his death our great King David delivered final instructions to his successor, the future King Shlomo: eliminate King David's two loyal friends: Yoav ben Tzeruyah and Shimi ben Gera (Melachim 1 2:5-9).

It is impossible not to be shocked by these words. True, King David had some conflicts with these two figures, but at this moment he is almost standing at the entrance to the supreme world: shouldn't he be striving to forgive everyone? And Yoav ben Tzeruyah faithfully served him over the course of many years! Shouldn't King David view his sins in a more proper perspective? Is this really the best advice to give to the young future King who is about to fill his role: to kill the great hero of the Nation? One who carried all of the Nation's battles for independence on his back?

We must first understand the sins of Yoav: "You also know what Yoav ben Tzeruya did to me and what he did to the two leaders of the armies of Israel, Avner ben Ner and Amasa ben Yeter, whom he killed; and shedding the blood

of war in peacetime, and putting the blood of war on the girdle that was on his loins and on the shoes that were on his feet" (ibid. v. 5). What is this all about? In the first section, which is found at the completion of the ongoing civil war: "And there was a lengthy war between the house of Shaul and the house of David" (2 Shmuel 3:1) regarding the inheritance of the kingship. Avner ben Ner, the leading personality in Shaul's house, reached the conclusion that continuing this dispute would not be profitable, and therefore worked to unify all of the Nation of Israel around David. After this, he approached David, who was then living in Hebron, and informed him that he was now accepted by everyone. David honored him and sent him on his way. At that exact moment, Yoav, the leading personality in David's house, returned from a military operation and harshly attacked his King: "What have you done?...You know that Avner ben Ner came to deceive you" (Shmuel 2 3:24-25). You are naïve, you do not understand anything about political ruses! Yoav immediately went after Avner, "Yoav took him aside in the gate to speak with him quietly and struck him there in the stomach and he died" (ibid. 27).

This is the exact model of political murder. Yoav thought he was acting for the good of the kingdom, and thought that he understood better than David what was for the best. In his Machiavellian zeal, the ends justified the means. In this sense, he was the anti-thesis of David: a person of pure conduct even under the most difficult circumstances. Do not be mistaken: Yoav was not a lowly adventurer. He was a per-

son of stature, a spiritual giant and a national hero. But his national zeal created a context for depravity.

There is a second incident, with similar circumstances, that is connected to a new civil war. Sheva ben Bichri organized a revolt against King David. He succeeded in assembling almost all of the Nation of Israel under his flag other than the Tribe of Yehudah who remained loyal to its king. David appointed Amsa, his Chief of Staff, to quickly gather the men of the Tribe of Yehudah as a last hope to save his dynasty. "Amsa went to muster the men of Yehudah, but he was later than the set time which he had assigned to him" (Shmuel 2 49:1). The reason for the delay was that the soldiers were immersed in learning Torah and could not be drafted. It is true that it is permissible to cease learning Torah for an obligatory war, such as a war of independence or a defensive war, but not for a civil war, regardless of its importance. Amsa decided to nullify the King's order, considering it illegal (Sanhedrin 49a), which ignited the fury of Yoav. Yoav approached Amsa and tried to calm his suspicions by saying: "Are you well, my brother?" (Shmuel 2 20:9). Yoav held Amsa's beard with his right hand, as if he was going to kiss him, and then killed him with his sword (ibid. 10). Much later, in the time of King Shlomo, Yoav was tried by the Sanhedrin in a special session on these two counts of political murder (Sanhedrin ibid.).

Nonetheless, one question still remains: Why did David, who was justifiably shocked by these two transgressions of

Yoav, keep him as the head of his army? Furthermore, why pass on the unfavorable task of punishing the guilty to the young King Shlomo – something that would endanger his standing in the eyes of the Nation, who saw Yoav as one of its greatest heroes?

Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet, known as the Rashba and one of the most important Rishonim (early authorities), answered this question. The background of his halachic answer is a reality of sinners who have had much power and endangered the community. In order to completely eradicate the "sharks," the Rashba suggests cooperating with the "little fish," whose transgressions are less severe. It is always possible to judge those sinners later if they do not repent in the meantime. The Rashba requests that we follow the path of King David, who ignored the sins of Yoav in order for him to aid in the war against enemies of the state, those who placed immeasurable fear upon and endangered the young kingship (Shut Ha-Rashba 2:238).

Imagine a downtrodden town in the Wild West, in which a group of bandits instilled fear into the residents with the help of their pistols. The concerned federal government decided to send a sheriff from one of the best law schools, a dynamo in jurisprudence, who wore a fancy suit, stylish tie and elegant glasses. He walked into the local tavern with a pile of law books under his arm and his diploma in his pocket. He approached one of the bandits and pointed out which section of the law he was transgressing this time. The bandit let

lose his anger and emptied the chamber of his gun into the sheriff, ending his short career. The federal government learned its lesson and decided this time to send the fastest pistol in the West. He did not complicate the situation by politely citing the sections of law - instead he shot the gangsters without warning. His strategy was more convincing. This sheriff brought quiet to the town and rode around on his white horse to ensure security for its residents. Years past and the mentality changed. Industry and technology spread, a modern city sprouted, but our sheriff continued to fulfill his role by riding on his horse between the cars and train tracks, shooting occasionally to keep the order. The central government therefore once again appointed a more elegant officer with a suit, tie, etc. who would use polite phrases such as "My dear friend," "You are the hero of my youth" and "I respect you." But now, he says: "I am the sheriff, therefore please hand in your weapon and you will receive in its place a book of tickets, a traffic whistle and a nametag. And – oy-va-voy - if you shoot another bullet since as brave as you are, I'll throw you in jail. Be forewarned."

During the time of King Shlomo, the situation had changed. All of the governors and generals had been replaced by civilian clerks. Yoav was now superfluous and dangerous, since the period of the gunmen with their finger on the trigger had past. The Nation was obviously more sympathetic to a shining soldier than a civil administrator. This is obviously not enough of a reason to eliminate Yoav. It would have been preferable for him to make himself and his deeds

forgotten instead of participating in the continuing revolt of Adoniyah. He did not learn to take advantage of the longevity which he was given by improving his conduct and there was therefore no way to commute his sentence. In fact, this revolt reminded David of all of Yoav's deeds and led to his uncompromising decision to eradicate him (Melachim 1 2:28-34).

The great national hero did not understand that the time of warriors had passed, and now Shlomo, the man of peace, was finally King.

Biography

Ha-Rav Shlomo Chaim Ha-Cohain Aviner was born in 5703 in German-occupied Lyon, France. As a youth, he was active there in the religious Zionist youth movement, Bnei Akiva, eventually becoming its National Director. He attended university, where he studied mathematics, physics, and electrical engineering. At the age of 23, infused with the ideal of working the Land of Israel, Rav Aviner made aliyah to Kibbutz Sedei Eliyahu, in the Beit She'an Valley of the Galil. He then went to learn at Yeshivat Merkaz Harav in Yerushalayim, where he met Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook, Rosh Yeshiva and son of Israel's first Chief Rabbi, Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Cohain Kook. Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah became his foremost teacher, and he became one of his "Talmidim Muvhakim - leading students." During this time he also served as a soldier in Tzahal - the Israel Defense Force, participating in the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War, earning the rank of Lieutenant. At the direction of his Rabbi, he joined a group that was settling Chevron and learned Torah there. In the year 5731, Rav Aviner became the Rabbi of Kibbutz Lavi in the lower Galil, where he spent half of his day working on the farm. In 5737,

he left Lavi to serve as the Rabbi of Moshav Keshet in the Golan Heights. In 5741, he accepted the position of Rav of Beit El (Aleph), in the Binyamin region of the Shomron. Two years later, he also became the Rosh Yeshiva of the new-established Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim (formerly known as Ateret Cohanim). Located in the Old City of Yerushalayim, Rav Aviner's yeshiva is the closest yeshiva to the Har Ha-Bayit - the Temple Mount, the holiest spot in the world. In its more than twenty year history, Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim has produced rabbis, teachers, educators and officers in Tzahal, while also promoting the building and settling of the city of Yerushalayim.

Rav Aviner has become a ubiquitous presence in Israel. He has published hundreds of books and articles, including *Sichot Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah* (talks by Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah), *Tal Hermon* on the weekly Torah portion and holidays and his multi-volume responsa *Shu"t She'eilat Shlomo*. His talks and responsa appear monthly in the Yeshiva's journal, *Iturei Cohanim*. While his opinions are frequently printed in Israeli newspapers, Rav Aviner also contributes weekly to four parashah sheets, "Ma'aynei Ha-Yeshu'ah," "Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah" of Machon Meir, "Rosh Yehudi" and "Olam Katan" which are distributed every Shabbat in shuls throughout Israel. He hosts two weekly radio programs, has a video blog (www.video.maale.org.il), teaches weekly classes and gives talks in many different venues. The yeshiva also sends out weekly teachings of Rav Aviner in Hebrew, English, French

and Spanish (to subscribe: toratravaviner@gmail.com) and has an English blog which is updated on a daily basis (www.ravaviner.com). In addition to these scheduled events, Rav Aviner also makes himself available to hundreds of people from all walks of life who come to him with questions via mail, telephone, fax, e-mail, text messages, his radio show and his video blog Q&A.