

CHAPTER ONE HUNDRED THIRTY-FIVE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Rubin

Somewhere in the darkest bowels of the Smithsonian Museum there has been a box laying, gathering dust for many years. It turns out that in this box are a number of early documentary films that were shot in Europe in 1910. Obviously they are silent films, yet they represent an interesting view of how life was lived all that time ago. One film in particular is very interesting, entitled, "L'Chaim!" It is a depiction of Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement, or what we all call lovingly, der heim. The film has been restored as best as can be and although I have not seen it, I was amused by the synopsis that accompanied an advertisement for its showing. "L'Chaim is an example of the earliest filming of Jewish life in Eastern Europe. It tells the story of three generations of shtetlach Jews, with all their woes and fears." What is the duration of the film? Three minutes! Only Jews could go through three generations of tzaros in three minutes, and do so much in silence.

Amusing as it sounds, our whole history seems to be encapsulated in such terms. We live in bold letters. Jews are a passionate, and seething people. Nothing comes easy, and all of our relationships are packed with drama.

Let us see how the Torah tells us of this. Yaakov is running away from his incensed brother Esau, he stops towards evening and falls asleep on the spot where the Beis Hamikdash would ultimately stand. He experiences a prophetic vision where he sees angelic beings going up and down a ladder to heaven, and Hashem promises that not only would He protect him during his exile in Lavan's home but He also promised that Yaakov would become the Patriarch of a great family, the building block of the Chosen People. Upon awaking from this dramatic dream, Yaakov declared the place on which he slept "holy ground" and vowed to return and build a sanctuary to Hashem on the very place where he saw the ladder reach the heavens, so long as Hashem would provide him with "some bread to eat and some clothing to wear."

There is a famous story told of the Brisker Rav who once visited the city of Minsk. Amongst the hundreds who came out to see the great sage, he spotted a past student who had left the yeshiva and went off into the world of commerce. The Rav called him over and with great warmth asked him how he was doing. The young man was very flattered by the Rav's interest in his well-being and answered, "Baruch Hashem, my brother in law and I are in business and it is thriving." The Rav didn't say anything and turned to the very many who were waiting to greet him.

Some time later he again called his ex-student over, "How are you doing?" The fellow was taken aback, but figured the Rav had forgotten that he had addressed this question earlier, so he repeated,

"*Baruch Hashem*, my brother in law and I are in business and we are growing day by day." Again the Rav did not comment and he returned his attention to others in the room. After some more time the Rav called the young man over for the third time. Again he asked about his well-being, this time the fellow couldn't withhold his curiosity, and so he asked the Rav why he kept asking him the same question. "Because you haven't answered me yet. The Gemara clearly states Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven.' This means that a person's financial and material standing is pre-determined by Hashem. Only spiritual matters are determined by the human being. When I asked how you were doing, I meant how you were growing spiritually, all you told me was how much Hashem was doing for you."

Yaakov was making clear his understanding of Hashem's world. "If Hashem will be with me ... and give me some bread to eat and some clothing to wear," meaning, the material is in Hashem's hands, and I pray He will provide for me; "and I will return beshalom, spiritually whole, to my fathers home," through my own efforts to perfect my service to Him I will return home as whole as when I left.

All the huge events that have happened to our nation are what Hashem has done, how we react, how we persevere, that is in our hands. This kapitel tells of the many miracles that have been the tapestry of Jewish life, it also tells of our need to have faith.

Halleluka, Hallelu Es Sheim... "Praise Hashem! Praise the Name of Hashem! Give Praise, you servants of Hashem."

The Jewish nation praises Hashem without any preconditions. We accept that all is in His Hands. This realization makes it possible to go on. The world is full of pain, but if you understand that everything stems from Hashem, then you can get beyond such pain. This mindset creates a bond with Hashem that bespeaks a true sense of praise.

Ki Yaakov Bachar Lo... "For Hashem selected Yaakov for His own, Israel as His treasure."

It is Hashem that took us for His nation, and this in itself is treasured by every generation.

Kol Asher Chafeitz Hashem... "Whatever Hashem wished, He did, in heaven and on earth; in the seas and all the depths."

It is all Hashem, nothing is without His will. Mankind can strut about thinking they are in charge, but it is all a mirage.

Shehika Goyim Rabim... "It was He who smote many nations, and slew mighty kings."

All that you see is but a vaporous vision; the reality is that no nation rises or falls without Hashem. Those that ride high one day, can fall the next. Only one thing is constant, and that is our link with Hashem.

Atzabei Hagoyim... "The idols of the nations are silver and gold, human handiwork. They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes but they do not see. They have ears but they do not hear; neither is

there any breath in their mouths. Like them shall their makers become, everyone that trusts in them."

The world is entranced by the silver and gold, the glittering trappings of power. In fact it is all empty; it is nothing and holds no life. Those who fall under its sway will live empty lives devoid of all spiritual hope.

Yaakov sleeps and dreams; he sees angels going up from this material world, and understands that spirituality is born here on earth. "Surely Hashem is present in this place!" Our forefather is telling us that every place where we find ourselves can be holy if we are aware of its potential. Material richness is Hashem's doing. But how we grow, is for us to decide.

Beis Yisrael Barechu... "O House of Israel, bless Hashem, O House of Aharon, bless Hashem."

Yes, Jewish life is a drama, seen in thousands of years, or three minutes silently, no matter, we write our lives audaciously. We bless Hashem; we know the truth. This is our secret, and if we keep connected with Hashem's truth, all the drama will be seen later as stepping-stones to our glorious redemption.

Text Copyright © 2010 by **Torah.org**. You can contact the author at Rabbi@theinformalproject.com.