

A VISION THING

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Among the items that were to be included in the building of the Tabernacle was acacia wood. And though there is no acacia wood in the Sinai Desert, Rashi tells us that 210 years before the exodus, on the journey to Egypt, Yaakov (Jacob) brought acacia trees to be planted in Egypt. He knew that one day the Jews would be liberated and would need a sanctuary in their sojourn. So he prepared wood. Yaakov had not seen his son for 22 years, yet mind while going to see Yoseph, he brought the material needed for a structure, that was to be built years in the future! What prompted Yaakov to think that way? Was there nothing else to bring to Egypt? Why wasn't he worried with the needs of the present? After all, 70 souls were entering a new land and culture. I am sure there were more pertinent things to bring than wood.

On a visit to Congregation Toras Chaim of Hewlett, NY, Rabbi Paysach Krohn told a wonderful story. Ponovez Yeshiva in Bnai Beraq is one of the most distinguished Yeshivos in the world. A number of years ago, at the beginning of a semester, a young boy from Switzerland who applied there was denied entry. The Rosh Yeshiva (Dean) told him to come back in a few years, his level of study was not advanced enough for the Yeshiva, and he also was a bit too young.

The boy said he understood, but he wanted to speak to the Rebbitzen, the widow of the founder and late Rosh Yeshiva of Ponovez, Rabbi Yosef Shlomo Kahanamen, of blessed memory. The Yeshiva administration was a bit surprised: Rav Kahanamen had passed away a number of years prior, and the young man did not claim to know the Rebbitzen. More important, she had no role in the admission process. Nevertheless, the young man was shown the Rebbitzen's apartment.

After a few moments, the boy emerged, and the Rebbitzen asked to speak with the Rosh Yeshiva. It took less than a few minutes, for the Rosh Yeshiva to emerge and motion the young student waiting outside of the Rebbitzen's apartment.

"Welcome to Ponevezer Yeshiva," the Rosh Yeshiva heartily declared. "We have decided to accept you wholeheartedly."

The boy smiled while many of the students and others who gathered outside the apartment were baffled. "What could have influenced the decision?" they wondered.

The young man solved the mystery for the students who had gathered near the Rebbitzen's apartment.

"When I was seven years old, one summer my mother and I vacationed at a Swiss mountain resort."

Coincidentally, the Ponovezer Rav z'l was in Switzerland for the summer and checked in to the only kosher hotel in the area - the one we were at! The problem was, the only available room was on the upper floor, and it was hard for the Rav to walk up and down. My mother heard about the problem and immediately offered to switch our room on the first floor, with his.

After thanking her profusely, the Rav called my mother and me into his new room. "I want to thank you, Mrs. Schwartz," he said. "I understand that when on vacation it is hard to move rooms, but more so I also want to express appreciation to your son. I'd like to buy him a toy in a gift shop. What would he like?"

"I told the Rav that I did not want a toy, I did not want any prize. I did not even want a few coins. All I wanted is to become a student one day in the Ponovez Yeshiva. The Rav smiled and said that he would accept me whenever I felt I was ready. Immediately, the Rav took out a pen and paper and wrote the note that I handed to the Rebbitzin today. Frankly, I never even read it. All I know is that the vision of my youth was fulfilled today."

Upon descending to Egypt, Yaakov Avinu knew that redemption would be a long way off. He also understood that one day there would be a Mishkan (Tabernacle) for his children. For without it, the exodus would be meaningless. Yaakov realized that a home for spirituality would be the key to Israel's survival. In Braishis (Genesis), after crossing a river, Yaakov worries about little things he left behind and returns to retrieve them. He worried about the small things that were dear to his children. He worried about the memories of the past. Here, Yaakov worries about what he needs to build the future.

There were flourishing Jewish communities in the early years of American Jewish immigration. The communities that had the vision to bring the wood to build a Mishkan - the home for Torah -- are still vibrant and flourishing. For with the vision for spirituality the Jewish people will always have the spirituality for vision. Good Shabbos!

Dedicated in memory of Morris Propp by Mr. and Mrs. Ephraim Propp
Good Shabbos!

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