

## CLASS 33 - VAYECHI

*by Rabbi Heshy Grossman*

This week's Torah reading is a Parsha Stumah, with no space separating VaYigash from Vayechi. This is not an oversight, but a reflection of hidden ideas, concealed within the blessings Yaa'kov Avinu bestows upon his children.

### **Rabbeinu Bahya explains:**

"This Parsha is closed for two reasons. One: for now begins the Galus, and their hearts [B'nai Yisrael] became closed with the suffering of servitude. Secondly: because Ya'akov hoped to reveal the end of time to his sons, but it was concealed from him....and similarly, Daniel said: 'for the words are closed and sealed until the time of the end....many will search for this knowledge.' (Daniel 12:9,4) And Isaiah said, as well: 'LMarbeh HaMisreh U'L'Shalom Ein Ketz - the increase of the realm [of Israel], and peace without end.' (Isaiah 9:6) The 'Mem' of 'Marbeh' is a 'Mem Stumah' alluding to the fact that the elevated nature and realm of Israel is concealed during the period of exile...." (commentary to Breishis 47:28)

Ya'akov Avinu descends to Egypt, to leave only in a coffin. This exile in Mitzraim is a portent of things to come. Someday in the distant future his descendants will suffer bitterly throughout a long and harsh exile, with no apparent end.

Before we are swamped with the sights and sounds of an empire celebrating its own success, let us try and understand precisely where we stand, in a world where the truth remains hidden and concealed.

While the culture of Rome revels in its glory, Klal Yisrael remains desolate and forlorn, with no hope in sight.

1

If all the world marks the new year at one time, this is not a mere coincidence, nor a matter of convenience. Though an individual person, or even an entire culture, may be unaware of the significance of their attitudes and behavior, Chazal have taught: "although he cannot see, their Mazalot do see." In other words, the holidays, lifestyles, and cultural norms that define a nation reflect their basic nature, evidence of a society's essential identity.

Why does the secular year begin with the first of January?

Chazal describe the origin of a certain ancient holiday.

"Kalanda - eight days after Teves....when Adam HaRishon saw the day begin to diminish, he wailed: Woe is me! Because I have sinned, my world is turning black, reverting to Tohu VaVohu. This is the death that has been decreed upon me in heaven."

"He sat for eight days in fast and prayer. When he saw the period of Teves, and the day begin to get longer, he understood that this is the way of the world. He went and made a Yom Tov of eight days duration."

"The following year, he made both these and those [the holiday and the days of fasting] Yomim Tovim."

"He established them for the sake of heaven, and they established them for Avoda Zara." (Avoda Zara 8a)

The world was created on the twenty-fifth of Elul. It is precisely at that time that the day begins to get shorter, as the approaching fall and winter seasons make their presence felt. As the solar cycle continues its natural pattern, the night reaches its longest point three months later, the equinox approximately coordinate with the original twenty-fifth of Kislev. >From this point on, the sun begins to smile once again, and slowly, but surely, the day beats back the night, with spring and summer sure to follow.

The parallel to the holidays of the present are hard to miss.

In the midst of winter, we light a little candle, for eight days, beginning with the twenty-fifth of Kislev, and continuing into the month of Teves.

On the eve of a twenty-fifth of their own, our adversaries crown the man who thinks he's god, celebrating until the eighth day, January 1st, certain that the day is theirs.

In the dark of night, Adam HaRishon celebrated both the fasting of the past, and the promise of the coming dawn. The suffering of the night is not ignored, but incorporated into the grander realization of a unified vision, dark and light together forming one integrated whole.

The heathen worshipper sees things a bit differently. He identifies only with the day, hence, he renews his year with the light that powers his existence.

Let us explain.

The creation of the world comprises two diverse elements at the heart of its existence: G-d's shining countenance, bestowing blessing and bounty, the source of all good, and also, the absence of G-d's hand, a dearth of Divine influence, the possibility of all evil.

At its source, all idolatry says this: man serves the force that constitutes the basis of his life, the entity providing the ingredients of self-fulfillment.

In a sense, Avoda Zara is the worship of one's self, the placing of one's own needs at the center of all

existence.

Christianity then, is the epitome of all such worship, and as such, it revolves around a man who makes himself god.

Striking at the heart of all creation, they grasp for the day, claiming for themselves the Divine beneficence that spreads blessing throughout the world.

This defines the average human being, conscious only of the light that fuels the day, unaware of a deeper aspect to creation. He identifies with G-d's outstretched hand, looking to strengthen his hold on a shaky existence.

His life begins with the day.

And there it ends.

Living solely in Olam HaZeh, the Christian world worships the force that fuels their day, conscious only of the visible and demonstrable success of power and prowess.

In contrast, our Rosh HaShanah begins three months prior, just when night begins to descend.

We understand that from the dark of night, in a world devoid of hope, a hidden truth is destined to emerge.

2

Onkelos, the nephew of Titus wished to convert. Before doing so, he magically raised the dead enemies of Israel, hoping to clarify the truth.

"Who is important in that world?", he asked of Bila'am.

"Israel"

"Should one attach himself to them?"

"Do not inquire as to their peace or welfare all of your days (Devarim 23:7)...."

"He went and brought up the sinners of Israel [Yeshu]."

"Who is important in that world?"

"Israel"

"Should one attach himself to them?"

"Inquire as to their welfare, and do not look for their harm."

"What is the punishment of that man?"

"In boiling excrement, for it is said, 'All who mock the words of the Sages are sentenced to boil in

excrement' "

"Come and see the difference between the sinners of Israel and the prophets of the idol-worshipping nations." (Gittin 57a)

In the same manner that man worships the forces that define his very self, he is also judged by the same measure with which he lived his life, his punishment in the next world a mirror image of his earthly existence.

Yeshu HaNotzri boils in 'Tzo'ah Rosachas'.

Let us understand why.

Chazal compare the birth of Christianity with the day the Egel HaZahav was first brought to life, a sin for which Israel suffers till this day.

When Moshe Rabbeinu does not appear at the appointed time, Klal Yisrael was tossed into turmoil. The agent of G-d was missing, where were they to turn?

Here lies the sin of the Golden Calf. That is: when Moshe Rabbeinu no longer transmits the word of G-d, we will produce a worldly substitute, an alternative approach to the law.

Where does the split of Christianity begin?

Our Sages explain.

Rebbe Yehoshua ben Perachiah, was third in line after Antigonus Ish Socho in receiving the Torah from Shimon HaTzaddik, last of the Anshei Kneses HaGedolah. After a forced exile in Alexandria, he returns to Jerusalem, accompanied by his students, among them Yeshu HaNotzri.

Along the way, they stop at an inn, where they are treated with great honor.

"How pleasant is this innkeeper!", said Rebbe Yehoshua ben Perachiah, praising her meritorious ways.

"But, Rebbe, her eyes are quite round!", said Yeshu HaNotzri.

"Rasha!", he declared, "Is that were you are involved in?". He proceeded to place him in Cherem...." (Sotah 47a - uncensored version of the Talmud)

Yeshu is sent away not for looking at pretty women, but for assuming that his Rebbe had been doing the same. He makes light of the words of the Sages, mocking the Torah they represent.

It is here that our ways part, in the Bais HaMedrash of Rebbe Yehoshua ben Perachiah.

Before the death of Shimon HaTzaddik, no dispute is ever recorded, and none is possible. As part of the Anshei Knesses HaGedolah, a body of judges with numerous prophets among them, the truth of their Torah was eminently undeniable. With the death of Ezra, the last of the prophets, the Torah

takes new form, henceforth it is the Oral Torah of the rabbis that sets the tone of Jewish life and law.

Antigonos Ish Socho receives the Torah from Shimon HaTzaddik, witness still to the heavenly revelation of prophetic insight. Yossi ben Yo'ezer and Yossi ben Yochanan are still privy to a Torah of an elevated nature, receiving the word from a teacher who saw the vision of a higher world.

But, suddenly, that world turns black, the last light flickers and fades.

Enter a world where the truth can be denied.

While the Torah SheB'Ktav bears heaven's imprimatur, an unimpeachable stamp of approval, the Torah SheBa'al Peh rests upon the authority of the Sages; the respect for their words and the willingness to humble one's self before their analysis of G-d's will.

Moshe Rabbeinu is missing, and it is precisely at this point that the faint of heart proffer their golden substitute.

In the desert, an Egel HaZahav emerges. Many years later, from the very Bais Medrash where Torah goes forth to the world, Yeshu rejects the Rabbinic basis of Torah SheBa'al Peh, producing a new god of his own. 'I am Moshe Rabbeinu', he declares, concocting a new testament that purports to continue the prophetic vision of an earlier time.

Human waste is the natural by-product of man's digestive system. Siphoning off the valuable nutrients that sustain his life, the body simultaneously disposes the superfluous components that will hinder healthy growth.

It is those substances that bear a particularly foul odor.

Having once been connected to life itself, the final separation leaves a vacuum that is never attractive.

The Torah is life itself, whether written or oral.

Yeshu leaves the Bais Medrash, repository of life. Flushed from the seat of humanity, he descends into a boiling pot of waste, the defining picture of his own existence.

From there he is forced to concede, Israel is the heart of life.

Unlike the wicked prophets of the nations, Christianity's entire being is predicated on its claim to Torah and the G-d of Israel. It is their rise to power that ultimately seals their fate, their position validating the basis of our faith.

"Come and see the difference between the sinners of Israel and the prophets of the idol-worshipping nations."

Whose millenium?

Rebbe Yehoshua ben Perachia lived during the reign of the Greeks, some two hundred years before the common era.

The Christian claim is this: we are Israel, heirs to the crown of heaven's grace.

To substantiate this assertion, the 'Jewish problem' remains to be explained, and a theology develops to displace the masters from their throne. With the destruction of the Temple in the year 70 c.e., Klal Yisrael is humbled into quiet submission, and their Roman oppressors proudly declare that the Torah is dead, with the Jewish people abandoned.

Though their hero lived two centuries prior, the leaders of the church press their point, they are the new chosen people, rising in place of a Temple that went up in flames. To do so, they author a fraud, Yeshu, their 'savior', salvaging the Churban, and they happily take our place. How convenient, then, to merely change a few long-forgotten dates, moving up two hundred years, they place his birth in close proximity to the Temple's destruction.

All over the world, their message is heard: G-d is ours, the Torah is ours, and all of life is in our hands.

4

"Amar Rebbe Yehuda bar Shalom: When Hashem told Moshe to 'write these words', Moshe requested that the Mishna be written. Hashem had foreseen that the nations were destined to translate the Torah, and read it in Greek, claiming that 'we are Israel', and until now the scales were balanced."

"G-d said to the nations: You say that you are my children, I don't know, but those who hold my hidden secrets are my children. And what is that? The Mishna, which is transmitted orally, all to be interpreted....."

"Said G-d to Moshe: What do you request, that the Mishna be written? What will be the difference between Israel and the nations? As it says: "I write for him most of My Torah" - yet - "it is considered foreign" (Hoshea 8:12). Rather, give them the Bible in writing, and the Mishna, orally." (Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Tisa, 34)

In a world where the truth has been long forgotten, and a parade of impostors have conquered all of life, one area remains pure and undefiled - G-d's hidden treasure, a secret domain known only to the few who dare to be different.

The Torah itself has been swiped from our hands, read to the masses who are fluent in Greek.

But, there is one place they cannot reach - man's inner heart, the lifeblood of all existence, the Torah SheBa'al Peh - 'Chayei Olam SheNotta B'Socheinu'.

As the society around us prepares to conquer the very air we breathe, spreading their message

throughout the far corners of the globe, let us retreat to a world that's only ours - "From the day the Bais HaMikdash was destroyed, G-d has nothing in His world but the four Amos of Halacha" (Brachos 8a)

In a world that has turned out the lights, we find comfort in the dark - waiting for the dawn that follows the night.

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