

THE INNS AND OUTS OF GALUS

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Parshas Vayeitze begins with Yaakov's leaving home, and travelling to Charan. On his way, Hashem appears to him in a dream:

And behold! Hashem was standing over him, and He said: "I am Hashem, G-d of Avraham your father, and G- d of Yitzchak... Behold, I am with you; I will guard you wherever you go, and I will return you to this very soil. For I will not abandon you until I have done that which I have spoken." [28: 13-15]

Even the most casual reading of Hashem's promise leaves one wondering: What happens after "Hashem has done that which he has spoken?" The pasuk implies that then, He will indeed abandon Yaakov! This seems to be somewhat of a mixed blessing.

Reb Asher, a wealthy merchant, once went through a period of extended financial decline, until he had lost everything he had, and was left a pauper. Brokenhearted, he travelled to his rebbe, the famed tzaddik, R' Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev zt"l, confident that his rebbe would find the right words to comfort his shattered soul.

"Six months from now," said R' Levi Yitzchak, "there is going to be a national lottery, with a very substantial prize. Go now, and buy yourself a ticket, and with Hashem's help, all will be well."

"Holy Rebbe," said R' Asher, "I have not the slightest doubt that the Rebbe's words will come true. In the meantime, however, what am I to do? I am completely broke, we have almost nothing to eat, and the pressure of my debt is crushing me!"

"Don't think," said R' Levi Yitzchak, "that it is beyond Hashem's means to care for you until the lottery. Now go, and all will be well."

On his way home, R' Asher stopped over in a certain inn. That night, the innkeeper, a wealthy landowner, had a dream.

In the inn, the dream went, there is a Jew. This Jew holds the winning ticket for the upcoming lottery. See to get it from him at all costs!

The innkeeper was struck by the vividness of his dream. Indeed, a Jew had checked-in to the inn last night. Is it possible that he had a ticket? He decided that his dream was too real to be a hoax. "Excuse me," he said approaching the Jew, "do you, by chance, possess a ticket for the upcoming lottery?" "Indeed, I do."

"I too," said the innkeeper, "have a ticket. For some reason, however, I would rather trade with you. And to make it worth your while, I'm willing to give you 5 ruble, along with my very own lottery ticket."

"No doing," said R' Asher. "I'm not selling my ticket."

The innkeeper upped the ante to 10, 20, and even 50 ruble, itself a tidy sum, yet the Jew would not budge. After all, what fool would sell the winning lottery ticket - even for fifty ruble! The Jew's stubbornness, however, only served to further seduce the innkeeper. He just had to have that ticket. If the obstinate Jew would not sell the ticket, he would take it by force.

He called in a few of his most trustworthy stewards, and gave them their assignment. They were to beat the Jew, and take his lottery ticket. Afterwards, they should bring him back to the innkeeper. They did as they were told. "It's too bad you didn't just sell me your ticket," the innkeeper said. "My offer was very generous. Alas, so things go. All the same, since I am an honest man, I intend to give you the fifty ruble I promised, along with my lottery ticket. Now, leave."

What was R' Asher to do? He had had the "winning ticket" in his hands - the fortune of kings - yet it had been taken from him by force. He reminded himself of the dictum of our Sages, "Gam zu le-tova, This too is for the best!" And at least he now had fifty ruble, which was enough to tide him over for quite a while.

The amazing thing, of course, is, that the innkeeper had been in possession of the winning ticket all along. He had just paid R' Asher fifty ruble to take the winning ticket in exchange for R' Asher's worthless ticket! Now, not only did R' Asher have the winning ticket in his hands; he even had a tidy sum of cash with which to make ends meet in the meantime...

When R' Menachem Mendel of Vishnitz would recount this story, he would conclude: This is what the pasuk means, For I will not abandon you even until the point that I have done that which I promised! Not only did Hashem promise to keep His word to Yaakov - He reassured him that even until that point, He would stand by his side. [See S'forno who indeed interprets the pasuk in this manner]

There was once a disagreement between two tzaddikim. One tzaddik felt that all our prayers should focus on bringing the Final Redemption - anything else is ultimately transient and temporary. The other tzaddik insisted that it is imperative to pray for the current needs of all Jews, as well as to pray for the Final Redemption. "Let me explain it to you," he said. "It's a cold, snowy day. A group of chassidim are braving the snow, the frost, and the blistering winds, and travelling to their rebbe. They stop for a moment to rest their weary feet. Suddenly, one of the chassidim breaks out a bottle of schnopps! 'Come, friends,' he calls, 'and warm your weary souls. True, we will be even warmer when we reach the inn to which we travel - but until we get there, a glass of schnopps will do the trick!'"

May we merit to see the Final Redemption speedily, in our days. And may Hashem fulfil for us His promise to Yaakov - and sustain us in galus (exile) with honour and blessing, until we make it to the Inn.

Have a good Shabbos.

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