

LEAVING YA'AKOV FOR YISROEL

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Ya'akov left Be'er Sheba in the direction of Charan. (Bereishis 28:10)

Though many Israelis love to travel (and there must be about 65,000,000 of them around the world, or so it seems from the many I came across on my recent trip), this tiyul was not Ya'akov's choice. It was destiny that pulled him away from home and out of his beloved Eretz Yisroel at the age of 63 years. After taking the blessings right out from under the nose of his evil brother Eisav, he had to flee home lest Eisav take revenge against him.

That was just a vehicle to force him on his way to accomplish his true purpose for leaving home: To marry the twin sisters of Lavan, Rachel and Leah, and to start building his own Bayis Ne'eman b'Yisroel — the 12 Tribes. Ya'akov was a man who was happy to sit in the Bais Midrash 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, which was fine except that he had things to do for the sake of history. Therefore, Divine Providence used the events of his life as a way to move him around from place to place.

In addition, Ya'akov had to leave Eretz Yisroel and spend 36 years away from home in order to bring about the most important transition of all: change from Ya'akov to Yisroel. For, as we see from the next two parshios, though he left Eretz Yisroel as Ya'akov Avinu, he returned 24 years later as Yisroel. For, it was at the border of Eretz Yisroel, while crossing the Yabok River, that Ya'akov fought with the angel and prevailed, earning his new name, Yisroel:

"Your name shall no longer be called Ya'akov, but Yisroel, for you have struggled with a heavenly being and with man, and have prevailed." (Bereishis 32:29)

True, the name change was not final, as the Talmud explains:

Bar Kafa said: Anyone who calls him (Avraham) "Avram" instead of Avraham, transgresses a positive commandment, as it says, "But your name shall be Avraham" (Bereishis 17:5) . . . According to this, if one calls Ya'akov, "Ya'akov" instead of Yisroel, should we not say the same thing? It is different because the Torah itself repeats his name later as Ya'akov, as it says, "And G-d said to Yisroel in the vision of the night saying, 'Ya'akov' . . . 'Ya'akov' " (Bereishis 46:2). (Brochos 13a)

This only seems to apply to his descendants, for as the Torah states:

Ya'akov came complete to the city of Shechem . . . (Bereishis 33:18)

Complete? Even Rashi was compelled to explain the meaning of this word, saying that the Torah is telling us that Ya'akov arrived healthy, wealthy, and wise. However, the Arizal goes a bit deeper, explaining that the word "shalaim" (complete), alludes to a state of being that can be summed up by one word: Yisroel. He taught:

A man who only performs (Positive) mitzvos merits the [level of soul called] Nefesh . . . However, [at this stage] he is similar to a woman whose husband has gone overseas and has left her without clothing, food, or drink. If this person then tries to learn Torah, constantly learning it and teaching Oral Law for altruistic reasons, then he will merit [the level of soul called] Ruach . . . He will then be like the woman whose husband has arrived to live with her forever in her house — clothing her, feeding her, giving her to drink, and bringing her to a higher level. If a person then endeavors to learn the Hidden Wisdom (the secrets of Torah), then he will merit to receive [the level of soul called] Neshamah . . . Then he is called Adam Shalaim (Complete Person) to whom the verse refers when it says: G-d made man in His image (Bereishis 1:26). The sod is as follows: when a person only possesses Nefesh, then he is only affected by the Name [of G-d spelled]: Aleph-Dalet-Nun-Yud. When he learns Torah altruistically, then he merits [the level of] Ruach, which comes from the Name [spelled]: Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh. When all three Names come together in the person they total the gematria of 112, the numerical value of Yabok (Yud- Bais-Kuf). (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 18)

And, of course it is no coincidence that the letters of Yabok are three of the four letters that spell Ya'akov, and that the fourth letter is an Ayin, the importance of which we have spoken about many times before, especially in connection with the concept of redemption. Indeed, the Zohar says that the three letters of Yabok each stand for a different word that comprises the phrase: y'anainu b'yom karainu — He will answer us on that day. Which day? The day of the Final Redemption.

Perhaps the yabok in Ya'akov represents the potential of Ya'akov to become Yisroel; the actual crossing of the river, whether it was a physical act or a spiritual one, or both, was the realization of that potential. By the time he achieved this tremendous level of completion, Ya'akov Avinu had already fathered eleven of the twelve sons, with the last one, Binyomin, already on his way. And, as we see from the events that followed, the brothers still had much left to do before reaching the greatness of their father.

Indeed, we shall learn, the rest of Jewish history is really the process of completing that which Ya'akov had begun, but had yet to see to completion before his death. And our generation may very well be the final act in this long saga which, as of this year, has consumed 3,560 years.

SHABBOS DAY:

For thus said Hashem: Sing, O Ya'akov, with gladness, exult on the peaks of the nations; announce, laud [God], and say, "O Hashem, save Your people, the remnant of Yisroel!" Behold, I will bring them from the land of the North and gather them from the ends of the earth. Among them will be the blind and the lame, the pregnant and birthing together; a great congregation will return here. With weeping they will

come and through supplications I will bring them; I will guide them on streams of water, on a direct path in which they will not stumble; for I have been a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn. (Yirmiyahu 31:6-8)

These pesukim are from the Haftarah for the second day of Rosh Hashanah. They are part of Yirmiyahu's vision of the future, when G-d will finally bring an end to this multi-millennia exile and bring the exiles of the Jewish people home, back to Eretz Yisroel in great joy and tranquility.

However, based upon the Malbim's (Rabbi Meir Levush, 1809-1879) interpretation, he offers an important insight relevant to our discussion. In fact, one could ask why it is that Yisroel needs to ask for salvation if the nation has already escaped oppression? The Malbim provides more than one answer to this question:

At the end of their exile, the oppression will be removed from them, and they will be joyous because they will be on the peak of the nations. The gentiles will give them honor and they will be at the heads of the nations, instead of being disgraced and lowered amongst them as they were previously. Ya'akov will be the masses of the people, and the lesser amongst them; Yisroel the great ones. The joyousness from being at the peak of the nations will be Ya'akov's only, and not Yisroel's, because they will want to return His Presence to Tzion. However, at that time they will "announce" and publicly proclaim, and "praise" Hashem when they say, "O Hashem, save Your [righteous] people, the remnant of Yisroel," because they will want the true salvation of the ingathering of the exiles and return to Tzion. Then it will be like that, that Hashem will return them: Behold, I will bring them . . . (Malbim, q.v. v'Tzahalu B'Rosh HaGoyim, Daniel 12:11)

Thus, the Malbim sees a division that will occur in the Jewish people at the end of days, one which will not occur along traditional lines. There will be two camps amongst the Jews, one called Ya'akov and the other called Yisroel, and the difference between the two will be based upon the desire, or lack thereof to reject acceptance amongst the gentiles as sufficient redemption.

Apparently it is the Ya'akov side of the Jewish people — the masses — who will be joyous about staying in the Diaspora, enjoying acceptance amongst the gentiles and even positions of leadership. On the other hand, this will not be satisfactory for the Yisroel camp of the Jewish people, and they will publicly long for the ideal form of redemption, for the return to Eretz Yisroel and to Tzion — true Tzion. It will be a great Kiddush Hashem, and apparently trigger the final stages of the Final Redemption.

This is a new spin on the name Yisroel. According to the Malbim, it is a name that signifies a specific attitude of the Jew at the end of days, one that leaves a Jew yearning for the complete and final redemption in every sense of the term. Whereas Ya'akov is satisfied with new-found freedoms and high positions amongst the gentiles, Yisroel only sees that stage of redemption as an intermediary one, on the way to the final return of the Jewish people to their land, and more importantly, the return of the Divine Presence to Eretz Yisroel.

In the late 1980s we witnessed the end of thousands of years of oppression when Russia, the last nation to physically oppress Jews on a mass scale, imploded and allowed Jews to migrate. We may not appreciate it, but our ancestors waited for thousands of years to witness this period in history, though the overall exile has not come to an end — yet.

Furthermore, the positions of leadership and authority that the Jewish people enjoy today within the gentile world are also unprecedented. We do not only have the ability to move around freely, but we have even been allowed to shape the policy of governments, or the financial institutions upon which they rely. Again, our ancestors would have had difficulty believing how far we have come in just two millennia!

Therefore, two out of three conditions of the Malbim's interpretation have been fulfilled to day, leaving one more to be realized: a split in the Jewish people. For thousands of years the Jewish people have been traveling a single road, in spite of other ideological differences. But, explains the Malbim, it is a path that at the end of days will reach a fork with one road called Yisroel leading in the direction of Eretz Yisroel, and the other path leading to ongoing life in the Diaspora.

And, let's not forget what Dovid HaMelech wrote about that period of history:

You will arise and show Tzion mercy, for the time to favor her, for the appointed time will have come. For your servants have CHERISHED her stones and FAVOR her dust. (Tehillim 102:14-15)

Just like the Malbim said.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

Ya'akov sent for Rachel and Leah to the field where his flocks were. He said to them, "Your father's face is not to me as it was before." (Bereishis 31:4-5)

The difference between a Ya'akov attitude and a Yisroel attitude may be the key to surviving anti-Semitism. "Anti-Semitism," it is said, "never really dies. It just goes underground, only to surface at a more opportune time." And though the Jewish people have yet to perfect themselves, we would still be tolerable if it wasn't for anti-Semitism, which is why so many Jews overlook the signs and get caught when it does rear its ugly and destructive head.

Not Ya'akov Avinu, or should we say Yisroel. He may have still been called Ya'akov, but he was on his way to being called Yisroel. It was in him. It was the way he looked at the world. The process of transformation was well under way, having begun after Ya'akov first bought the birthright from Esav, and subsequently acquired his blessings. As Ya'akov stood there before his father, he had already become a hybrid, a unique creation and a combination of Ya'akov and Eisav that eventually would be called, "Yisroel." In the meantime, he was described by his father in the following terms:

"It is the voice of Ya'akov, but the hands of Eisav." (Bereishis 27:22)

And Yitzchak meant it, and not just because the man who stood before him to receive the blessings

seemed to have hairy arms like Eisav, and a religious tone like Ya'akov, but because the overall perspective of how to function in the world seemed to be a combination of both sons. There before him was a man of action that was shaped by the realization of Divine Providence, and for this he was completely worthy of the blessings.

Not everyone would have reacted to the face of the anti-Semite the same way Ya'akov did in his time, nor would they react that way now. His reaction to Lavan's slight change of attitude suggested a certain sensitivity to Heavenly changes, allowing Ya'akov to read Lavan's change of face as a sign from Heaven that it was time to return home. Where others saw a moody human being, Ya'akov saw a message from G-d that his time in Padan Aram had come to an end; his mission there was complete.

It is a message that one can only see and accept if moving on was always part of the game plan. If everywhere a person goes, points in the direction of Jerusalem, then every stop along the way is exactly that, just a stop along the way. It allows a person to remain flexible, since he never allows his roots to sink too deeply into the local soil. He can afford to pay attention to the currents of history and the smiles and frowns of the nations that are only his temporary host.

The time has come for kibbutz golios, the ingathering of the exiles. The oppression has ended, and we have succeeded in rising to the top of the gentile world, in one way or another. Yet, anti-Semitism has returned, and politics are forcing Jews to make strange relationships, and to become dependent upon people who, in many cases, want our end. What does it mean?

That all depends upon whether you are looking at all of it through the eyes of a Ya'akov, or of a Yisroel.

MELAVE MALKAH:

And if after these [negative occurrences] you will not be chastised toward Me, and you behave casually (kerry) with Me, then I too will behave toward you with casualness (b'kerry); and I will strike you, even I, seven ways for your sins. (Vayikra 26:23-24)

This is what the Torah means by these pesukim. G-d throws pitches to the Jewish people: sometimes to the outside of the plate, and sometimes inside, forcing us to decide how to strike it. Unlike human pitchers, He never misses His mark, and knows each batter better than the batter knows himself. And, as that ball crosses the plate, it creates a moment of crisis, leaving room only for a quick choice how to respond to the pitch.

A strike means missing the point of the event, of the Hashgochah Pratis. It is, in the language of the posuk, dealing with events b'kerry, as if Heaven has little if anything to do with what is happening. A home run means picking up the message Heaven has sent, and responding to it in the way G-d wanted, in a way that allows us to become partners in the fulfillment of the purpose of Creation.

As history winds down, technology allows us to do so much more, good and bad. It allows us to

become aware of so much more, much faster than ever before. There are so many people in the world doing so much all around the clock, but as the Talmud says:

No punishment comes to the world except for Israel, as it says, "I have eliminated nations, their TOWERS have become desolate" (Tzeephaniah 3:6), and it says, "Just fear Me, accept chastisement." (Ibid. 7). (Yevamos 63a)

But all of it is just a different facet to one question: Are you Ya'akov, or are you Yisroel?

Ya'akov is a name that implies we live our lives holding onto the heel of our twin brother, Eisav. Whereas Yisroel is a name that means we fight against the highest and lowest in Creation, and still come out on top. Ya'akov is a follower; Yisroel is a leader. Ya'akov, says the Malbim, is the lesser element of Klal Yisroel, accepting a partial redemption as the complete one. Whereas Yisroel settles for nothing less than the real thing: kibbutz golios and the return of Divine Providence to Eretz Yisroel, once again returning to the Temple that was, and will be soon again, G-d willing — the vital link between Heaven and earth.

The Kabbalists also point out that if you take the first letter of the Ten Sefiros, add up their numerical values and include the kollel (adding one for each of the five letters of Yisroel), the total value is the gematria of Yisroel. This serves to emphasize how the concept of Yisroel is the sole reason for Creation to exist, and by becoming a Yisroel one actually achieves this tikun on a personal level.

President Bush has just been re-elected, but that can work as much against the Jewish people as can work in favor of us. If the last Israeli election taught us anything at all, caution cannot be cast to the wind when it comes to investing trust in secular leaders. Allies can become strangers overnight, and betrayal can come at a moment's notice. Arafat may be dead by the time this parshah comes around, but his death can leave a leadership vacuum that can work against peace more than ever before.

It all depends upon where Creation is holding at any given moment in time. It all depends upon what G-d wants from Creation at any moment in history, which has everything to do with where we are holding in the struggle to be transformed from the depths of Ya'akov to the Heavenly heights of Yisroel.

Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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