

SEE YAAKOV RUN

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

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

See Ya'akov run. See Ya'akov run fast and far. See Ya'akov set precedent for all of his descendants for thousands of years to come. See Ya'akov's descendants run from place to place for millennia, fleeing for their lives and often with only the shirts on their backs, and sometimes not even with that. What a way to start Jewish history. What a way to finish it.

Throughout Jewish history, Jews have, ostensibly, done two things: wonder and wander, and they are not as different from each other as they may at first seem. Indeed, they are actually interrelated and interdependent, which may explain why both of them have been so necessary, in spite of the fact that we long and love to settle down.

Exiles has a bad name because they are associated with the times that the Jewish people have lost their sovereignty, and often their religious freedom as well. National exile is never self-imposed, but imposed from above, and therefore it always appears to be punishment for non-Torah behavior. That is certainly the way the Torah describes it.

But, it was not uncommon for many righteous people to self-impose personal exile on themselves. The Vilna Gaon was known to do so on a somewhat regular basis, leaving behind his wife and family and going to places where they might not know him, leaving him instead to fend for his survival. This is the way he worked on his humility and his appreciation for even the most basic things God gave to him.

In fact, all that happened in last week's parshah that is resulting in Ya'akov's leaving home and Eretz Yisroel in this week's parshah, was for this very reason. God runs the world and controls people and events, so if He had wanted Ya'akov to remain at home, He could have arranged events differently. One can assume that, if taking the blessing forced Ya'akov to flee for his life, that is what God intended for him.

To appreciate the role of exile, we need to understand the basis of the Hebrew word itself, which is spelled: Gimmel-Lamed-Vav-Tav, the root of which is only the Gimmel-Lamed. This is interesting, because that part of the word is also the root of the Hebrew for "reveal." Indeed, all we have to do to create the Hebrew word for "to reveal" is add a Lamed to the four letters of "golut"- Lamed-Gimmel-Lamed-Vav-Tav-making it l'galot.

In other words, the point of exile is to reveal. The question is, reveal what? It is to reveal many things, but most of all, it is to reveal God, both to the person in exile and to the people amongst whom the person has been exiled.

Around that time, Avimelech and Phichol, the general of his army, said to Avraham, "God is with you in all that you do." (Bereishis 21:22)

Avimelech went out to him from Gerar with a company of his friends and Phichol, the general of his army. Yitzchak said to them, "Why have you come here when you hate me, and have sent me away from you?" They answered, "We saw that God is with you." (Bereishis 26:26-28)

God was with Yosef and he became a successful man. He [lived] in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that God was with him, and that God made him successful in all that he did. (Bereishis 37:2-3)

Hence, the name of Dovid HaMelech's famous Philistine opponent was Golios, or Goliath in English. This is because he inadvertently became the source of a great Kiddush Hashem and revelation of God by being such a formidable foe, and then falling prey to Dovid HaMelech's miraculous slingshot throw.

Apparently, Dovid HaMelech picked up on this, because he used the battle opportunity in such a way:

"You come to me with spear and javelin, and I come to you with the Name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel which you have taunted. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I shall kill you, and take off your head, and I will give the carcasses of the camp of the Philistines this day, to the fowl of the air and to the beasts of the earth, and the earth will know that Israel has a God! And all this gathering will know that not with sword and javelin does the Lord save, for the battle is the Lord's, and He will deliver you into our hand." (I Shmuel 17:45)

Talk about trust in God! Talk about a Jewish battle cry! Talk about a revelation of God, both to those through whom it happened, and to those who witnessed it as well. Somehow, being settled and feeling at home can interfere with both, as the Torah warned:

After God, your God brings you into the land about which He swore to your fathers Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, to give you great and wonderful cities, which you did not have to build, houses full of good things, which you did not have to put there, and wells that you did not have to dig, and vineyards and olive trees which you did not have to plant, you will eat and be satisfied. Be careful not to forget God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. (Devarim 6:10-12)

There is something about routine that desensitizes us to the ongoing Divine Providence of God. It doesn't mean that we stop saying "Boruch Hashem," or "Thank God," after mentioning the good things we enjoy in life. But, it does mean that we stop thinking about what those words actually mean, or should mean to us.

For example, imagine being a waiter in a restaurant when someone orders a cheese quiche. You take the order, and promptly pass it on to the kitchen which promptly tells you to go back and tell the patron that the cheese quiche is not available at the moment, since, due to an oversight, the cheese ran out. After having told the patron about how good the quiche is, you are now embarrassed to go back and tell him that there is no cheese for the quiche.

"How about I go to the local store down the street and quickly buy some more cheese," you tell your boss.

"Don't bother," he tells you. "It's a waste of time and manpower. Just tell the gentleman that we are unable to provide him with the quiche he ordered, and I am sure he will understand," your boss says, moving on to more important matters.

But, you are still unable to return and face the person, so you suggest to your boss, "How about if I don't charge you for my time?" You assume, or rather hope, your tip will make up for the loss of salary.

Your boss looks at you funny-like. "Gee, you're really set on getting the guest his quiche, aren't you?"

You smile sheepishly, and try to pick up some brownie points along the way by adding, "A fine restaurant such as ours should not have to admit to under-ordering something as basic as cheese. It won't look very good."

It works. Your boss's pride has been touched, and clearing his throat, he tells you, "Alright. I'll give you 15 minutes to get there and back," he says, sounding generous. "But after that, it's your time."

"Great!" you say, as you remove your waitering attire, and grab your jacket, and race out the door.

However, unfortunately, the local store is also out of the cheese you need, forcing you to go even further to guarantee that your patron will get his quiche. Should you go further? Is it worth it? Maybe your boss was right after all. Besides, how much longer can you take before the patron decides he has waited long enough for his quiche, not even knowing what you are going through to get it for him!

"Just one more store ." you mutter to yourself, as you chase off in search of some cheese, getting wet, as rain begins to fall. "Great!" you say sarcastically to yourself. "Why doesn't a tornado just come ." you start to say, finishing off by reprimanding yourself, "Don't even mention it. It might just happen!"

Twenty minutes later, five minutes on your own time, you are on the way back to the restaurant with your prize cheese, somewhat drenched, tired, and even a little disillusioned. "No tip is worth this!" you complain to yourself. "They certainly do not pay me enough to warrant my running around like this to protect their reputation."

Back at the restaurant, both your boss and the guest are getting impatient. "Good, you're back," your boss says. "Next time, just tell him that we have no cheese please," he says with a sarcastic tone in

his voice, which you choose to ignore. Instead, you give the chef the cheese, and smiling, he takes it from you and tells you that they ran out of dough for the crust. "Just kidding!" he adds.

"Haha ." you say, mockingly.

An hour, and four more guests later, you return to pick up the signed credit card receipt, and notice the tip. Your eyes widen, seeing that it is barely 10 percent of the actual bill. Disappointed and frustrated, you notice the guest reaching for his coat, and then the door. Unable to control yourParashas self, you follow him to his car, at which point he turns around and sees you. Surprised, he says, "Did I forget something?"

"Yes," you tell him, "You forgot to tip me for my effort!"

"No," the man politely corrects you. "I put the tip on my credit card. Just ask your manager and he'll show you."

"No, I saw that tip ." you tell him. "I'm talking about the one for what I had to go through to get you your quiche ." you tell, going into all the details of what you did and why.

Ten minutes later, the man tells you, "Wow. I had no idea that you went through all of that just so I could have my cheese quiche. If you had told me that you were unable to make it for me, I would have understood. However, after having heard your story, you are definitely right: you deserve a bigger tip," he says, pulling out an additional \$10.00. "In fact, you deserve a raise as well!"

"Thank you very much," you say taking the money.

You see, this is the problem with a stable material life. We get up in the morning, go to shul, pray, come home, have breakfast, kiss the kids goodbye, go to work, earn a living, come home at the end of the day, pray some more, have supper, do some learning or something recreational, go to bed, and start the whole cycle again the next day, more or less.

Some days we are energized, most days we are tired. We work hard, or at least try to. Eventually, we equate our tiredness with our activities, and develop a sense of entitlement. "This is my money, my house, my luxuries," a little voice inside of us says. "True it all comes from God, but in a sense, I bought it from Him with my efforts," as the Torah warned we would:

You may think to yourself, "It was my efforts and abilities that made me successful." (Devarim 8:17)

And, if we don't remember that it is all a gift from God? If we choose to bury the hand of God at the bottom of all that we do and accomplish? Then it's golut, to reveal to us that:

Remember: God, your God is the One who makes you successful ... (Ibid. 18)

Nothing reveals that more than exile. In exile, there is no sense of entitlement. In exile, everything seems like a gift, from people who are courteous to you, to the food you eat. Even basic things that we take for granted, like personal hygiene, seem like a gift when you can take care of yourself, as

you like to, even away from home, even in strange environments that you have no control over.

Once a person told me that when he says "Asher Yatzar" away from home, the blessing that one says after going to the bathroom, he has in mind not just the ability to do so, but also to be able to do so in a dignified manner. Exile brings such levels of sensitivity out in a person, until even the most common elements of life seem like a gift from God, which they are, especially for a Jew.

More than likely, Ya'akov Avinu already appreciated this reality. However, he was about to become the father of the 12 Tribes, the source of all Jews to come. And, to make sure that they shared in his realization, they were born in exile, while he had to live in it. This inculcated within the Jewish people an ability not only to survive in exile, but to learn from it what it has to teach, so that maybe, just maybe, we can eventually do away with them altogether.

Text

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