

IN SEARCH OF WHOLE

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

This week's Parsha is divided into two distinct parts (Perek 11). The first half deals with the Menorah, the inauguration of the Leviyim into the service of the Mishkan in exchange for the first born, the first Pesach following the Exodus and the dedication of the Mishkan, the establishment of Pesach Sheni (The "Second-Pesach"), the movement of the nation as indicated by the cloud over the Mishkan, and the forging of the two silver trumpets.

The second half of the Parsha (after Shishi) focuses our attention to the happenings within the society of the Jewish encampment. As Rav Hirsch wrote, "We are led down into the midst of the camp of the nation to see how much training and maturation this nation still required in order to fulfill the lofty aims that had been set for it." (8:1)

The nation began to "kvetch." "The Manna isn't sufficient for us. We miss the fish, melons, squashes and vegetables that we ate in Egypt! The legal restrictions, especially in the arena of family law and sexuality are too limiting! Oy vey! Woe to us!

Moshe turned to G-d for guidance in his personal frustration and disappointment at the expressed attitudes and complaints of the nation. G-d instructed Moshe to gather 70 worthy elders who would share the burden of administering the people and their needs. He also guaranteed that the nation would be given enough meat to satisfy their physical cravings 'ad nauseum.' Before the episode of the complaints was concluded Eldad and Maydad, the two worthy elders who were not chosen to be among the 70, prophesized that Moshe would die and Yehoshua would lead the nation into Israel.

The episode of the Slav - quail is detailed culminating in a plague that punished the nation for lack of appreciation and trust in G-d. The Torah then recorded the episode of Aharon and Miriam speaking against Moshe and Miriam being punished with Tzaraas (leprosy).

From the perspective of what "should have been", the Jewish people were within months of entering the Promised Land. Had they remained focused on their mission as the Chosen People they would have avoided the punishment of the 38 additional years in the desert as well as altering the rest of history. How is it that the closer they came to attaining their goals and ideals the more obsessed they became with physicality and materialism? They had witnessed the grandeur of the Parting of the Sea, the awesome majesty of Revelation, and the constancy of G-d's caring and love in miraculously providing them with shelter and sustenance. Why did they begin to lose faith and

trust in G-d so near to the promised goal?

Similarly, we find this happening again at the end of the 40 years in the desert with the incident of Baal Peor. There too the Jews were poised at the edge of the Promised Land waiting the final moments of their crossing. Yet, they sinned terribly with the Midianite women bringing G-d's wrath down upon the nation. Why is it that our desires for physicality and materialism awaken with such force at the moments of our greatest spiritual triumphs?

In last week's Rabbi's Notebook I ended with the question of, "Why the 50 days?" Why did G-d intend that the Jews spend 50 final days in the desert between the 9th day of Av and the Nation occupying the land? (My question presumed that the Jews had not sinned with the Spies. It theorized that had the Spies returned with an encouraging report the Jews would have crossed over the Jordan on the first day of Tishrei, Rosh Hashanah, 2450. It assumed that they were always intended to spend at least 18 months in the desert from the time of the Exodus until entering Israel.)

The time spent in the desert was to provide the time and training necessary for the nation to integrate their physicality with their spirituality. From the beginning of time this has been humanities greatest challenge. On the one hand, we are physical creatures no different than any other of G-d's creations. On the other hand, we were endowed with a divine Nefesh - soul that sets us apart and above the rest of nature. However, that which satisfies the body may be poison for the soul, and that which satisfies the soul is often rejected by the body. Obviously, had G-d wished for us not to be physical He would have made us into angels; therefore, physicality is G-d's intention and G-d's intention cannot be intrinsically evil. Physicality is not evil and we do not believe that physicality is evil; however, we do believe that physicality is a challenge.

The name Yisroel captures the essence of that challenge. Yitzchak and Rivkah comprised the unnatural whole. They accomplished, as best seen in the Akeidas Yitzchak (Binding of Isaac), the total sanctification of the physical in service to the spiritual. Only Yitzchak, the physical and material Yitzchak, was ever offered as an Olah Temimah - the perfect Ascent offering. It suggested the total subjugation of his physical being in service to G-d. In that capacity he married his complement Rivkah and gave birth to Yakov and Eisav.

(Personal Note: Rivkah was born into a family where everything, including spirituality (note: Billam) was in service of the physical - in service of personal avarice and desire. Note: It also explains why he becomes blind and why he was the only of the Forefathers to be a farmer rather than a shepherd.)

However, as I just noted, Yitzchak's accomplishment was unnatural. It cannot be presumed that Yitzchak's accomplishments are common to all of us. It is not G-d's expectation that we be like Yitzchak. Instead, the two components, Yakov and Eisav, the spiritual and the physical, were separated at birth so that the process of integration could be studied and imitated. The "tent" of his parents protected Yakov's young and vulnerable spirituality so that he physically matured with the

proper focus and goals. Unfortunately, Eisav's physicality was not properly attended to (See Rav Hirsch Ber. 25:27) and it became an end in and of itself rather than the means toward serving G-d and humanity. (The name Sadeh - field, and Bayis - house that is used in reference to the Bais Hamikdash - Temple reflects upon the two approaches in serving G-d. Eisav is the Sadeh and Yakov is the Bayis. The Bayis was built in or on the Sadeh)

With the purchase of the Birth-right Yakov assumed the dual role of Eisav and Yakov. He alone became the role model of the humanly possible and therefore attainable integration of the physical and the spiritual, or the physical in service of the spiritual. The catalyst for being able to do so was the study of Torah. (77 years of continuous study. Kidushin 31a)

Yakov completed the integration of the two components of Yakov and Eisav into a single whole in his battle with the Angel of Eisav. That battle concluded with the Angel changing Yakov's name to Yisroel. As the Torah states, "You have become a prince among the angels and man." (Translation of the Targum) Later the Torah states, "And Yakov came 'whole' to the city of Shechem."

We are called the Bnai Yisroel - Sons of Israel. We are not called the Bnai Avraham, or Yitzchak, or Yakov. We are the product of Yakov's successful integration of the two components, Eisav the physical and Yakov the spiritual into Yisroel. We are the issue of the one (which includes his four wives) who was "a prince among angels and man." We are the heirs to the very real and able integration of the physical in service to the spiritual.

However, the fact that Yakov became the Ish Hashaleim - the whole man - the physical man whose face is engraved on the heavenly throne only indicates our potential. It does not guarantee our individual or collective success. The challenges to our own spiritual maturation are constant and individual. We are each challenged and we are each able to succeed.

In last week's Parsha, the Torah presented the institution of the Nazir. The Shem Mishmuel explained the focus and process of the Nazir. The Nazir desires to grow spiritually. He wishes to immerse himself in the totality of G-d's service, no different than the Kohain Gadol - High Priest. To do so he separates himself from the regular workings of society and devotes his time and energy to the study of Torah and the doing of Mitzvos. The Torah places three basic demands on him.

1. He is not allowed to eat grapes or grape by-products.
2. He is not allowed to come in contact with the dead.
3. He must not cut his hair.

The Shem Mishmuel related the three demands to the three mediums of our service to G-d: grapes = speech, death = physical action, and hair = thought. He further connected the three offerings brought by the Nazir at the conclusion of his Nazir period to the same purpose of sanctifying the whole person, his speech = Shelamim - peace offering, his actions = Chatas - sin offering, and his thoughts = Olah - ascent offering in service to G-d.

This week's Parsha begins with the lighting of the Menorah. Most of the commentaries explain the Menorah's significance as the integration of the whole person, especially his intellect and knowledge, in service to G-d. The Laviyim and their service in the Mishkan are key to our integration of the spiritual and the physical. Both the Laviyim and the Mishkan are physical entities that represent the totality of the physical in service to G-d.

The holiday of Pesach and the adjunct Pesach Shaynie also reflect upon the national and the personal commitment to the total integration of the physical in service to G-d.

Finally, the movement of the nation as determined by the clouds and the trumpets is another prime example and training for that generation of their physical comforts and reality being directed by G-d and therefore being committed to His service. (See Rav Hirsch)

However, the second half of the Parsha focuses us on the actual process of the integration. Regardless of experiences and awareness, teachings and ideals, the integration of the physical in service to the spiritual is up to all of us and each of us. Two issues are detailed: food and sexuality. Two conflicts are foremost in the integration of the physical in service to the spiritual - food and relationships. (Same as with the Nazir - grapes and attending funerals) Both are natural and necessary for the human creature and both are structured and directed by the Torah.

The generation of the desert was clearly divided into tribes and families. The distinctions were protected by the Torah to insure proper division and transfer of the land as well as to protect the autonomy and purpose of every tribe, family, and person. Surrounded by the manifestation of G-d's generosity it was impossible to deny the obvious. Their physical existence was completely dependent upon G-d. However, as they neared the Promised Land, as they prepared to live a physical life of luxury and wealth in a land flowing with milk and honey, as they readied themselves to live a physical existence in service and subjugation to G-d, the Eisav and Yakov components of Yisroel engaged each other in battle.

It was never supposed to be easy. It was never supposed to be a guaranteed success. We were always intended to fight for what we believed in and to fight to integrate the Eisav and the Yakov.

The number 50 reflects upon success. We received the Torah on the 50th day after leaving Egypt. The Yovel - Jubilee comes every 50 years and reorients the nation as to its proper division of land and purpose. So too, the nation needed a final 50 days in the designed training classroom of the desert in order to ready them for entering the land. Had they not sinned with the Spies, the nation would have arrived at the edge of the Jordan ready and willing to undertake the job of the Chosen People. They would have been ready to present to the world a society founded upon the integration of the physical world in all its glory in service to G-d, and it would have done so confirmed on the Day of Judgment.

Unfortunately, there were many among the nation who failed the challenge. They gave into their physical desires in thought and action without the integration of spirituality and purpose. The

episode of the quail was physical cravings being demanded and then satisfied, not in service to G-d. For the Jews that was tantamount to death. It denied their choseness and their heritage. It denied who they were supposed to be.

Finally, the Torah presented the ultimate challenge between the physical and the spiritual at it highest level. Even the great Aharon and Miriam struggled with their humanness and therefore assumed that Moshe too struggled with his. In truth they were not wrong. Moshe too struggled with his physical in subjugating it to the service of G-d. However, Moshe had succeeded. Moshe had won his fight. Moshe was the complete Ish Haelokim - Man of G-d. He was the embodiment of Yisroel, the prince among angels and man. As G-d said, "He is the most trusted in all my home." To be the most trusted can only mean one thing. "I trust that Moshe will use his free will to direct his thoughts, speech, and actions, the totality of his physicality in My service."

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