

SECRETS OF SURVIVAL PART III

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Two weeks ago, I established that Jewish survival is predicated on three elements: Torah, Mesorah (transmission of G-d's word from generation to generation), and Eretz Yisroel. In the Rabbi's Notebook for Vayichi, I explained why Yakov insisted on placing his right hand on Ephraim's head rather than on the head of his older brother Menashe. Yakov's intent was to show that Torah, and only Torah, defines us as the Chosen People and although it is essential for us to engage the non-Jewish world and interact with them we should never lose sight of who we are and what we are. We were chosen by G-d to receive His truths, live by them, cherish them, and then selectively teach them to the rest of humanity. "You are to be for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." Nothing is more important than Torah.

In the Rabbi's Notebook for Shemos, I explained that the system for the transmission of Torah from generation to generation was set from the inception of humanity and will never change. (Maimonides 13 Principles of Faith # 9) Torah must be transmitted from parent to child and from a teacher to his or her student. No other method for its transmission is viable because Torah must also teach humility, and humility is learned when we realize that truth and goodness, falsehood and evil, are defined by G-d and only G-d. Every subsequent generation from Adam until the end of time must learn the truth from the generations that preceded it. It is the only guarantee that human behavior can be consistent with the absolutes of goodness and evil.

This week, I would like to explain the third element in Jewish survival - the symbiotic relationship between the Jewish nation and Eretz Yisroel (the Land of Israel).

Parshas Vaeyra begins with G-d's response to Moshe's challenge of last week. "'Why did You make it worse for the Jewish people, why did You send me?' G-d answered, 'What you think happened and how you feel about it is not really important. Stand back and see the might and glory of My justice. It is now time for the redemption!'" The Talmud points out that G-d's response contained five expressions of redemption (6:6) "V'hotzaysee - ...and I will take you out of bondage; (6:6) V'hetzaltee - ...and I will rescue you from the labor; (6:6) V'gualtee - ... and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm; (6:7) V'lukachtee - ...and I will take you out to be My nation; (6:8) V'hayvayse - And I will bring you to the land that I promised to give to your forefathers and give it to you as a heritage..."

At the Passover Seder, Chazal (the Rabbis) ordained that we drink four cups of wine to commemorate each of the first four expressions of redemption stated in the above verses. The question is obvious, what about the fifth expression V'hayvayse - And I will bring you? Why didn't the

rabbis ordain a fifth cup of wine to commemorate the fifth expression of redemption? Most commentaries explain that the fifth cup of wine is the cup of Eliyahu. The reason we do not drink a fifth cup is because the fifth cup represents the coming ultimate redemption when the entire nation will be gathered from the four corners of our long exile and "be brought" back to Eretz Yisroel. That redemption has not yet happened and it is inappropriate to drink a triumphant cup of wine until it happens. Instead, the cup is set aside for that time when we will hear Eliyahu HaNavi (Elijah the Prophet) announcing that Mashiach is here and it is time to go home!

Why is the coming ultimate redemption predicated on returning to Eretz Yisroel? Why has the return to Israel and Jerusalem been the cry of survival throughout the best and worse times of our history?

The order of the redemptive expressions in this week's Parsha indicates that the first four expressions of redemption were four stages leading up to the final and fifth expression V'hayvayse - And I will bring you to the Promised Land. Again, why does coming to Eretz Yisroel equal the final redemption?

Avraham's history altering mission began with G-d's command, (Bereishis 12: 1-2) "...Go to the land that I will show you... I will make you into a great nation... and you will become the source of blessing for the entire world." At that time G-d did not promise that the land would become his; nevertheless, G-d's promise of fame and blessing was dependent on his going to the "land that I will show you." What was it about the land that guaranteed G-d's promises to Avraham? More so, as soon as he arrived in "the land that G-d had shown him," Avraham was forced to leave to Egypt because of hunger. Why did G-d make it that he should leave so soon after arriving?

Avraham's first recorded monumental prophecy at the age of 70 of the Bris Bain Habsarim (Covenant Between The Halves) outlined the first stages of Jewish national development. The culmination of that 400 year process was, (Bereishis 15:16) "The fourth generation will return to the land..." Again, why was Eretz Yisroel so important that it was the focus of the Exodus?

The Torah records four separate times G-d promised Avraham that his children would inherit the land of Israel. Why?

Before meeting Avimelech G-d promised Yitzchak that his children would inherit the land. Why wasn't the promise to Avraham sufficient? Why did it have to be repeated to Yitzchak?

When Yitzchak wanted to bless Eisav, and Yakov "took" the blessing, why didn't the blessing include the land of Israel? Yitzchak first gave the "blessings of Avraham" including the land of Israel to Yakov when he had to flee before Eisav's wrath. Why then and not before?

G-d twice promised Yakov that his children would inherit the land of Israel, once at the dream of the ladder before he left Eretz Yisroel and the second time when he returned to Eretz Yisroel from his 20 years with Lavan. Why wasn't the promise to Yitzchak sufficient? Why did it have to be repeated to Yakov?

Before blessing Menashe and Ephrayim, Yakov repeated to Yoseph that G-d had promised him the land of Israel. Yakov does not repeat the promise to any of the other sons. Why was it so important to state the promise before he blessed Menashe and Ephrayim and why to Yoseph?

Before Yoseph died, he repeated to his brothers that the time would come when they would be redeemed and taken to the land that was promised to their forefathers. Why was it necessary for Yoseph to repeat the promise that all of them already knew before he died?

To understand the centrality of Eretz Yisroel to Jewish survival, we must go back to the blessing of survival, the blessing that Yakov conferred upon Menashe and Ephrayim. (Bereishis 48:3) Yakov began his blessing to Menashe and Ephrayim by referring to G-d as 'Kail Shakai.' We know from this week's Parsha, (6:2) that the name Kail Shakai was unique to the Avos (Patriarchs) (see Rashi and Darash Moshe). The name "Kail" references G-d's all encompassing mercy. The name "Shakai" references G-d's revealed intent for all of creation through the established demarcations and differences that He created between all things. It means, "the G-d Who sets limits."

Yakov understood that the tendency of all humans, especially his children, is to assimilate and eliminate differences. At times the desire to be "the same" is so great that humans will even obscure the demarcations between humans and animals. Through their behavior, they will demean themselves to mere animals or demean themselves by attributing human characteristics and value to animals. Either approach is motivated by the desire to do away with the natural differences that G-d has established between humans and animals. They do so because acknowledging and accepting differences places demands on the human that obligate him to be responsible and take responsibility. It forces humanity to acknowledge their divinity.

Speciation and differences within humanity is the most difficult for us to accept. As much as humankind is defiled by bias, intolerance, bigotry, hatred, and a horrific lack of humility, the fact remains that we naturally rebel against the imposition of differences that obligate us to be different and "better."

Whether as responsible members of society, responsible members of a family, or responsible servants of G-d, the tendency is to flee from responsibility and obligation. Most Jews would like to believe that they are not chosen. They may pride themselves on Jewish history, traditions, and the cultural emphasis on intellect and education; however, they do not want to accept that they are any more responsible than any other nation, culture, or religion.

The fact is that we are different. Not only because our histories, traditions, and cultures are different, but mostly because G-d set us apart and said we are different. Just as light is separate from darkness and land is separate from sea, and animal is separate from man, and male is separate from female, so too the Jew is separate from the rest of humanity. Not because we are superior or better or smarter or better looking than anyone else. We are different only because Hashem made us so and chose us to assume responsibility that is ours and only ours. In fact, no one else but a Jew may

assume the responsibility of Torah and if he does so without the benefit of conversion, he denies G-d's intentions and is a thief!

Yoseph was the quintessential Jew among the non-Jews. Alone from the tender age of 17, he courageously maintained the values of his forefathers and uncompromisingly represented the greatness and glory of G-d's truth. If anyone could have questioned the need for Eretz Yisroel as essential for Jewish survival, it was Yoseph. More so, he managed to raise two extraordinary sons who Yakov would designate as being no less and no different than his own two sons, Reuven and Shimon! Yakov even went so far as to underscore the fact that they were raised to such extraordinary spiritual commitment and obligation before he came to Egypt! They did so without the benefit of extended family and Eretz Yisroel! Yoseph and his sons were living proof that the uniqueness of being Jewish was not a natural condition unique to the Jew but the result of human determination, discipline, courage, self-sacrifice, devotion, and commitment. In essence, anyone who wished to embrace the strength of his own divinely ordained free will, a quality shared by every human equally, could be and live as a Jew! Eretz Yisroel is not necessary for Jewish survival! Hasn't history proven that? Hasn't the Jew survived the assault of history while exiled from their land and dispersed among the nations?

Yakov began his blessing of Jewish survival, the blessing to Menashe and Ephrayim, by first evoking the name "Kail Shakai". G-d is the all encompassing G-d of compassion and mercy. G-d is also the Creator who deliberately and intentionally established natural demarcations between all things different and wonderful. His reasons for doing so was to reveal to each and all that they were created for a specific reason. True, in many ways they share a similar destiny that is human; however, within the sameness of humanity, there are clear and unequivocal differences that must be accepted and embraced by all. Otherwise, humanity will fail its mission of being the greatest of G-d's creations and the reason for His having created a universe. There is no greater act of compassion and mercy than to reveal to someone the purpose of his creation. Happiness is predicated on our doing our jobs. So much time is spent seeking that job and many fail to recognize it or accept it. The differences G-d established reveal the purpose of our being here and the direction of our happiness.

Geographical differences are demarcations that are as natural and divine as anything can possibly be. They have nothing to do with intellect or history, culture or traditions. They are differences that exist as products of creation and the passage of time. After introducing his blessing for Jewish survival with the name Kail Shakai, Yakov repeated to Yoseph that Eretz Yisroel had been promised to the children of Avraham. "Do not think that your survival as a Jew was accomplished by the power of your intellect and conviction alone. True, what you accomplished alone in Egypt is proof of the human spirit and the strength of free will; however, your survival as a Jew is equally, if not more dependent on G-d's selection of Avraham's children to become His chosen nation. Just as the Land Of Israel is unique because G-d and only G-d made it so, so too is the ability of the Jew to survive the

passage of history regardless of time or circumstance. It is the byproduct of your chosen-ness that is as divine as creation itself.

However, the human spirit comes with an ego. The ego drives us to greatness, but with the danger of assuming success as the byproduct of personal commitment and effort. The survival of the Jew depends first and last on humility and being subject to G-d. That subjugation and dependency transcends all personal qualities and courage. We survive because Hashem so decreed that we will survive just as He created the differences between one geographical location and the next.

Jewish survival depends on the land promised to our forefathers. The fact that we must survive even in exile does not diminish the importance of Eretz Yisroel as a source of humility and survival.

To be continued...

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