

THE CHILDREN WILL RETURN TO THEIR BORDERS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 128, The Sandik at a Bris. Good Shabbos!

RavFrand is dedicated in honor of Chayei Sara bat Esther, who is currently seriously ill. Please study this class in her merit and pray on her behalf for a speedy recovery.

Note: This week's class was originally delivered shortly after Rabbi Frand returned from his first trip to Eretz Yisrael [Israel].

Where Is Yaakov's Negotiating Technique?

Yaakov Avinu asks that he be buried in the Machpelah Cave - "in the grave that I bought for myself (asher karisi li) in the Land of Canaan" [Bereishis 50:5]. Rash"i comments that the word 'karisi' is understood in the Medrash to share a common etymology with the word 'kur' (a pile).

When Yaakov Avinu purchased Eisav's right to be buried in the Machpelah Cave, he took all the money that he had acquired in Padan Aram and he made a pile (k'ri) of gold and silver. He said "Eisav, here is the whole thing -- all the money that I made outside the Land of Canaan (Chutz L'Aretz). Take it! It means nothing to me. Just sell the Cave of Machpelah to me."

The question can be asked: We all know that Yaakov Avinu was, to say the least, an astute businessman. Any person who could negotiate with Lavan was certainly wise to the ways of business. When negotiating on a piece of property, one does not put out all his money and say "Take it."

Standard procedure would dictate that Yaakov make an opening offer, say 500 Dinar of gold. Eisav would counter "No way! A thousand Dinar of gold is appropriate". Yaakov would counter "750". They would shake hands, say "Mazal and Bracha" and we would all respond Amen.

Here, Yaakov Avinu gives everything he has as his opening offer. Is this the way to negotiate?

I purchased a sefer [book] in Eretz Yisrael, which offers an interesting interpretation. Yaakov had a reason for acting this way.

Chazal say on the verse "And Yaakov feared greatly and he was troubled" [Bereishis 32:8], that what Yaakov feared was the two merits (zechusim) that Eisav had in his favor. The two things Eisav had in his favor were the Mitzvah of Inhabiting the Land of Israel (Yishuv Eretz Yisroel) and the Mitzvah of Honoring his Father and Mother (Kibud Av V'Em). For the 20 years that Yaakov was living in Padan Aram he could fulfill neither of these commands, while Eisav was able to fulfill both of them.

Because of these two mitzvos that Eisav possessed, Yaakov was afraid. Somehow, Yaakov had to negate and show that he was not lacking in either the Mitzvah of Yishuv Eretz Yisroel or in the Mitzvah of Kibud Av V'Em. How did he do this? How did he show that Love for the Land of Israel was still a part of his body and soul? How did he show that Kibbud Av v'Em was important to him?

By telling Eisav -- Take all the money I made in Chutz L'Aretz, just so I can have an inheritance in the land of Israel. Let me be buried in Eretz Yisroel and let me be buried in Kever Avos -- next to my parents.

Thus in one fell swoop, Yaakov Avinu showed that both the Land of Israel and Honoring his parents were crucial to him. By contrast, Eisav in the same fell swoop, showed how insignificant Eretz Yisroel and Kibbud Av were to him. For a pile of gold he was willing to give up not only Kever Avos, but burial in the Land of Israel.

That is why Yaakov Avinu, despite his business acumen, says, "Take it all". He wanted to prove to Eisav and to everyone the importance of the Land of Israel and the importance of the Ancestral burial plot.

Seeing the Good of the Land: The Holiness of Tel Aviv

I have a different appreciation for the following insight now (after visiting Israel) than I did two weeks ago. I have "come and seen the Land and it is very very good" [Bamidbar 14:7].

A student of Reb Yisrael Salanter once went to his master and told him that he was going to Eretz Yisrael, the Land of Israel. He inquired of his Rebbe what he should be careful about. Reb Yisrael told him to be careful not to transgress the prohibition of speaking Lashon HaRah [evil] about Eretz Yisrael.

Just as our ancestors' actions set patterns for us in a positive direction (ma'aseh Avos siman l'Banim), so too can they do in a negative direction. There was an action of our ancestors concerning Eretz Yisrael -- the incident of the Spies. This incident implanted for all generations a tendency within us,

that when a person goes to visit Eretz Yisrael he may wish to dwell on its shortcomings rather than on its tremendous attributes. Reb Yisroel therefore told the student "Be careful, and don't stumble in the sin of the spies."

This is something that I try to bear in mind. There is perhaps a handicap in going to Eretz Yisrael for the first time at my age, rather than when younger. But the positive side is that one can be very aware and very cautious of this prohibition. One can make a concerted effort to see 'the good of the Land and its fat places'.

A verse concerning our forefather Avraham says "And G-d said to Avraham, 'Lift your eyes and see from the place where you are standing there. For all the land that you see, I will give to you and your children.'" [Bereishis 13:14] Before G-d showed Avraham the Land, he advised him to lift up his eyes. That is the approach that one must take when viewing the Land of Israel. It must be with 'lifted eyes'. It requires, sometimes, an uplifted vision to see beyond the imperfections and to recognize the beauty and greatness of the Land.

When the Gerrer Rebbe, zt"l, went to Eretz Yisrael before the Second World War he wrote back a letter and referred to the "holy city of Tel Aviv". His Chassidim wondered -- we would understand "the holy city of Jerusalem"; we would understand "the holy city of Hevron"; "the holy city of Tzfat" -- But the "holy city of Tel Aviv"?! What is so holy about Tel Aviv?

The Gerrer Rebbe wrote back and told his Chassidim, "The only Houses of Worship in Tel Aviv are synagogues! Other cities have churches and mosques, but Tel Aviv is holy -- it has only synagogues!"

This is the "lift your eyes" -- to see that Tel Aviv has its holiness and not to dwell upon the imperfections.

Deep Down We Are All Brothers - Hopefully

Yes, there are problems in Eretz Yisrael. In two weeks I did not become an expert, and can not tell people anything they don't already know about Eretz Yisrael and its problems. There is a serious problem between the religious and the less religious. I like, however, to believe that the ill feelings are only on the surface, and nevertheless, deep deep inside, everyone knows that his neighbor is Jewish and that in times of trouble, in the final analysis, we are all brothers.

I was walking on a street in Jerusalem and a little boy approached me. This was perhaps the sweetest moment of my visit. The boy asked me, "Can you help me cross the street?" I never saw the kid in my life; I'll probably never see him again. But I am Jewish and he is Jewish and therefore I am his uncle or I am his brother or I am his father.

When people are running after a bus in Jerusalem, everyone yells to the bus driver "Stop!" Why?

Because a fellow Jew is chasing the bus.

Experiencing Biblical Verses First-Hand

Of all the holy places that I had the merit to visit, the most moving place for me personally was Kever Rachel. In this week's parsha, Yaakov Avinu tells his son Yosef "When I came from Padan Aram, Rachel died upon me when there was yet a measure of land to go until reaching Efras." [Bereishis 48:7]

"Don't have complaints to me that I didn't take your mother the short distance between Kever Rachel and the Cave of the Machpela. The reason I didn't take her there was based on Divine command. There will come a time when Jews will go into Exile, they will pass by Rachel's tomb and Rachel will argue for the Jewish people and G-d will respond 'The children will return to their borders' [Yirmiyahu 31:16]. That is why I buried Rachel there, sitting among the children of Yishmael, and not in the tomb of the patriarchs."

I went to Kever Rachel right at Mincha [afternoon service] time. There was a minyan there and a Jew said "Let's daven Mincha". There is a little chazan's amud there and a small paroches [cover in front of the Ark]. On that paroches the words are inscribed, "The children will return to their borders".

A Hungarian chassidishe yid, bekkeshe, round black hat, gartel, gets up and starts davening (Bureech Ata...). Right next to him is another Jew, a Sephardi, who answers in the Sephardic pronunciation (Ba-ruch A-ta...). And I'm standing in the middle, born in America, educated in American Yeshivos and I say (Baruch Ata...) using my pronunciation.

I look around, and I look on the parochos where it says "And the children will return to their borders" and I say to myself, "Am I not living this verse? Do I not see a Jew whose ancestors got stuck in Hungary and another Jew whose ancestors were dragged by the Exile to Spain or to Turkey or to Salonika or to Yugoslavia and my parents got stuck in Germany and I got stuck in America? And we all pray with our own unique pronunciations. But in front of my eyes was written "And the children will return to their borders". From Spain, from Germany, from Hungary -- we have witnessed the return of the children to their borders from the four corners of the world. One goes around and finds different customs -- Chassidim, Misnagdim, Sephardim, Yemenites... At Kever Rachel we find that the children have returned!

My last day in Jerusalem we took a tour of the Old City. The guide pointed out the Ramba"n Synagogue. Ramba"n wrote to his son "What can I tell you about the land, great is its abandonment and desolation. As a rule, the more holy the place, the greater its destruction. Jerusalem is the most destroyed; Judea more than the Galilee, etc. etc." Here we stood in the rebuilt synagogue of the Ramba"n and the rebuilt Old City, which a mere 20 years ago was off limits. One can actually sense that Redemption is coming.

We were standing there in a beautiful courtyard of the Old City and the tour guide was speaking. Suddenly, a little kid with a knitted Kippah comes out with his soccer ball and begins practicing shooting balls at a goal against a wall in the Old City.

The noise of the soccer ball was reverberating in the echo chamber and I asked myself "Is this right? Is it right that within 3 blocks of the Western Wall, literally in its shadow, a kid is shooting a soccer ball against a wall?"

As if by script, the tour guide quoted the verse in Zechariah [8:4-5] "Thus Sayeth the L-rd of Hosts -- Yet again will old men and women sit in the streets of Jerusalem ...and the roads of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in her streets."

To the backdrop of the guide reading this verse, the kid was kicking the ball against the wall. I said to myself "It is not incongruous. It is not inappropriate. It is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah."

Personalities & Sources:

Reb Yisrael Lipkin of Salant (Reb Yisrael Salanter) -- (1809-1883) Founder of the Modern Mussar movement, stressing ethical behaviour.

Gerrer Rebbe -- Rav Avraham Mordechai Alter of Ger (1866-1948), authored Imrei Emet; Fourth Generation of Ger Dynasty. Son of Sefas Emes.

Ramba"n -- Rav Moshe ben Nachman (1195-1270); Forced to flee native Spain in 1263 after he demolished arguments of apostate Pablo Christiani in debate arranged by King James of Aragon. Settled in Eretz Yisrael in 1267 at age 72.

Glossary

(Yishuv) Eretz Yisrael -- (Dwelling in the) Land of Israel

Mazal and Bracha -- Fortune and Blessing (said at conclusion of business negotiations)

Kever Avos -- Patriarchal burial grounds

Kibbud Av v'Em -- Honoring` Mother and Father

Lashon HaRah -- Evil (speaking) tongue

chevra -- comrades

Moshiach -- Messiah

Kever Rachel -- Rachel's Tomb

chazan's amud -- Cantor's podium

paroches -- Ark covering

Chassidishe yid -- a Jew of Chassidic background

bekkeshe, gartle -- long black coat, black prayer belt worn typical of certain Eastern-European Jewish communities.

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