THE SUN ALSO RISES

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 # 217, Terrorism: How may an individual respond. Good Shabbos!*

The Sun Also Rises

The Torah tells us that after Yaakov fought with the Angel of Eisav, "The sun rose and was shining upon him" (Yaakov) [Bereishis 32:32]. The Talmud in Chulin [91b] relates a story involving Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Yishmael, and Rabbi Akiva. They were shopping to buy meat for the wedding of Rabban Gamliel's son. Rabbi Akiva inquired about the meaning of the above verse: "Did the sun just shine for Yaakov? -- It shone for everyone." To which R. Yitzchak responded "The sun that set for him, rose for him."

What is the meaning of the Talmud's question and answer, and why was it necessary for the Gemara [Talmud] to tell us the details regarding when this discussion took place?

The Menachem Zion provides a beautiful interpretation. We know from other places in the Talmud about the relationship between Rabbi Akiva and his companions. One such famous incident is located at the end of Tractate Makkos (24b) -- and such stories are repeated many times in the Gemara.

Rabbi Akiva lived at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple and he lived into the period of Exile after the Destruction. It was a time of terrible depression. It was one of the worst periods in Jewish history. Jews were downtrodden, desperate, and at times, hopeless.

It was always Rabbi Akiva's practice to cheer up his companions and to tell them not to give up hope. In Makkos, we learn of the incident where the Sages saw a fox emerge from the area that formerly housed the Holy of Holies. The Rabbis broke down and cried until Rabbi Akiva comforted them, explaining that what they saw was a positive omen. [If the prophecy that predicted that foxes would walk in that place was fulfilled, so too the prophecies of redemption will be fulfilled.]

The Talmud tells us regarding this period that from the time that the Government (Romans) started

oppressing them, they should have made a decree that people should not marry and have children, because it is better perhaps to let the Children of Avrohom die out on their own rather than to suffer this persecution. Nonetheless, the Gemara concluded that such practice would not be acceptable. However, it is clear that the spirit of the times did border on hopelessness.

Rabbi Akiva was walking with his friends to buy meat for the wedding of Rabban Gamiliel's son. Rabban Gamiliel was thinking, "What am I doing -- I am marrying off my son so that I should see grandchildren who will be killed by the Romans?"

Rabbi Akiva saw that Rabban Gamliel was in a state of despair. He was not rejoicing over his son's wedding. Rabbi Akiva wanted to breathe life and spirit into his friends. So he invoked the principle that what happened to the fathers, foreshadows what will happen to the children (Ma'aseh avos siman l'banim).

Look at what happened to Yaakov in Parshas VaYetzei. He reached the nadir of his career -- the lowest of the low. Yaakov had to run away from home. His brother was trying to kill him. He did not have anything to call his own. There he is and the sun sets -- both figuratively and literally -- for Yaakov Avinu. It gets dark. Yaakov moves into a period of night and goes into an exile with a Lavan who tries to rob and cheat him. The sun had set for Yaakov.

But what happened? Yaakov persevered. He did not give up. Yaakov remained steadfast and honest. He returned after that long exile -- whole in body, whole in money, whole in his religion. Yaakov made it through the night and the sun now rose for him.

Rabbi Akiva was telling his colleagues: "Do not give up. What happened to the fathers will happen to the children. The sun that set for Yaakov, eventually also rose for him. There was an end to the exile and to the night."

And that has been the history of the Jewish people. We go through the night. We went through the Roman oppression, we went through the Inquisition, we went through pogroms, through T"ach, vT"at [1648 - 1649]; more recently, we even went through a Holocaust. But we will come out of it all.

Netzach Yisroel Lo Yishaker [The Eternal One of Israel does not lie - Samuel I 15:29]. There will be an end. The sun that set for us during the time of destruction will eventually rise for us again. And we -- as a nation -- will come back again physically whole, materially whole and spiritually whole.

Sources and Personalities

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