

WHY THE BICYCLE RIDERS?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Toldos

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #305 The Bracha of "Baruch Sheptarani".
Good Shabbos!*

Being Tired Is Not A Jewish Concept

The Torah says, "And Esav returned from the field and he was tired (a-yef)" [Bereishis 25:29]. Rav Nissan Alpert notes that this is the first time in the entire Torah that we find the word "a-yef", that someone was tired. If we examine the life of Avraham Avinu, our forefather Avraham, we certainly find cause for him to be tired, but the Torah never says that he was.

Avraham lived a long, hard and arduous life. He had to leave his birthplace, give everything up, and travel to Canaan. In Canaan he was confronted by famine so he had to travel on to Egypt. After returning to Canaan, he helped set up his nephew Lot and became involved in what was literally the First World War, in order to save Lot. He had children late in life; he was confronted with the trauma of Akeidas Yitzchak [the Binding of Yitzchak]. Avraham had a hard, long, tiring life.

Nonetheless, the Torah never describes Avraham as tired. Avraham never starts to contemplate retirement. Eisav is the first person by whom we find the word "a-yef" written. What is this telling us?

Rav Alpert suggests that being tired from life is not a Jewish concept. If a person's life is involved in spirituality - in Torah and in Mitzvos - then there is a blessing: "Those whose hope is HaShem will have renewed strength; they will grow wings like eagles. They will run and not grow tired, they will walk and not grow weary" [Isaiah 40:31]. One does not become tired from doing Avodas HaShem [the Service of G-d]. Avodas HaShem is in fact rejuvenating. At times it may be frustrating and one may

think that he is running out of strength, but the blessing is that he will not, in fact, run out.

It is a different matter when one is an Eisav and when one's primary role in life is being out in the field 'hunting'. Our Sages say that on the very day that Eisav came back complaining that he was tired, he had transgressed 5 horrible sins, including the 3 cardinal sins. Therefore it is no wonder that he came back claiming that he was tired. If a person's life is devoid of spirituality, when a person has no purpose in his life, then it is very easy to become worn out. When a person sits around all day playing cards, then one quickly tires of playing cards. But those who trust in G-d will not become tired nor grow weary.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986) lived into his nineties. When Rav Moshe's condition weakened and he was taken to the hospital before he passed away, when he was literally on his death bed, he commented, "Ich hob mer nisht kin koach." [I have no more strength.] That was the end of his life. At that point his spiritual goal and his life's work were finished. When one's life work is finished, then there is no more strength. But up until that time, although he was 92 and had been sick, "those whose hope is HaShem have renewed strength."

Often our great Torah personalities, despite being very elderly, have the strength to remain on their feet and talk for hours. From where do they get that stamina? This is the idea expressed by Rav Alpert - being tired is not a Jewish concept.

Avimelech Said It First: You Jews Are Too Rich

On many occasions we have stressed the fact that the overriding theme of the book of Bereishis is that the actions of the forefathers foreshadow the fate of their descendants [ma'aseh avos siman l'banim]. We have explained that this theme is not just a prophetic blueprint for what will happen to the children. Rather, the fact that the Patriarchs were able to endure certain experiences gives us the ability and strength to survive parallel occurrences in our own individual and collective lives.

In Parshas Toldos, we are introduced to an aspect of ma'aseh avos siman l'banim which has been with us since time immemorial - namely, Sin'as Yisroel, the hatred of Jews for no reason whatsoever. This concept is articulated when Avimelech tells Yitzchak that it is time for him to leave: "Go away from us, because you have become much mightier than us (atzamta mi'menu meod)" [Bereishis 26:16]. The Medrash elaborates on this charge of Avimelech: "All the strength and power that you have accumulated - is it not from us?"

To paraphrase the continuation of the Medrash: "In the past you had only one little shop, and now you own an entire mall". This is the prototype of all future anti-Semitism. No matter what the Jew does, the nations of the world will find a reason to blame him for his behavior.

The Reisha Rav suggests homiletically that the verse "Judah went into exile from poverty and from an abundance of work" [Eicha 1:3] hints at this same idea. Whatever we do, the nations will always find fault with us. When Yitzchak first came to Gerar, the population did not want to have anything to

do with him because he was poor. "We do not like Jews. They are too poor!" When Yitzchak became wealthy, they said "We do not want you. You are too rich!" Sometimes they wish to send Jews into exile because we are too poor (galsa Yehuda m'oni) and sometimes they wish to exile us because we are too industrious or too rich (m'rov avodah). The bottom line is, whatever the reason may be, they will always find a reason to dislike the Jews.

November 7th was the anniversary of the communist revolution in 1917. This event is no longer marked in the former Soviet Union. They no longer celebrate communism; it has been sent to the ash bin of history. Is it not ironic: when communism started, we were blamed for being responsible for bringing it in. In the 1930s, the Jews were purged from being members in the communist party. Then, they blamed the Jews for being capitalists. Today, they are blaming the Jews for the fall of communism.

Make up your mind -- Did we start communism? Did we defeat communism? Were we capitalists? Were we communists? Did we make it work or did we make it fall? Tell us, what did we do?

The answer is that it does not make a difference. Judah is exiled for both wealth and for poverty. The nations do not like us however we are.

A famous story is told of a Jew walking along and being approached by an SS officer. The SS officer pushed the Jew onto the ground and asked him "Who is the cause of all the troubles in the world?" The Jew answered, "the Jews and the bicycle riders". The officer asked him, "Why the bicycle riders?" He responded, "Why the Jews?"

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
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This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Toldos are provided below:

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