

BECOMING THE HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD

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 #462, May A Child Carry A Sefer On Shabbos. Good Shabbos!

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Becoming The Head of The Household

The pasuk says, "And with you shall be one man from each tribe (ish, ish l'mateh), a man who is a leader of his father's household (rosh l'beis avosav, hu)." [Bamidbar 1:4] The Sefer Imrei Shammai has an encouraging insight on this pasuk. The author comments that every person has the opportunity to be a leader of his family.

The Sefer Imrei Shammai cites a cute story. A Jew who was an ignoramus (Am ha'aretz) approached another Jew who was a scholar (Talmid Chacham) and started bragging about his lineage: "You should know my 'yichus'. I come from a line of great people! However, you do not come from

anyone of importance." The Am ha'aretz was obviously jealous of the Torah scholar. He had only one thing going for himself - his great ancestors - so he bragged about his lineage. The Talmud Chacham answered him sharply, "The difference between us is that your 'yichus' ends with you. In my case, my 'yichus' begins with me."

This capacity - to begin a distinguished family lineage from oneself - is hinted at in the above quoted pasuk. Every person (ish, ish), no matter from where he comes, has the ability to become the head of his own family (rosh l'beis avosav, hu) - meaning the beginning of an illustrious chain in his own family that will henceforth trace its origin to him.

No person should feel discouraged because he comes from humble beginnings. On the contrary - 'yichus' has to start somewhere. If it hasn't started from one's ancestors, let a person make every effort to insure that great lineage begins with him.

A Chassidic tale is told involving the Maggid of Mezrich. When the Maggid of Mezrich was five years old, a fire burned down his house. His mother sat in front of the rubble crying. She explained to her son that she was not crying because she had lost her house. The cause of her great grief was that a family tree (shtar yuchsin) going back many many generations was lost in the fire. Tradition has it that the five year old, future Maggid of Mezrich, consoled his mother with the words, "Don't worry mommy. I am going to start a new 'yichus'."

He in fact became the start of a great line of Chassidic leaders. Today if someone can show that he traces his ancestry back to the Maggid of Mezrich, he is considered to be a person of great lineage. Every person has the ability to become the "head of the lineage of his household." Some people have the fate of being the "end of the line" of the 'yichus' of their family. Others are able to begin a new line of 'yichus,' from themselves forward.

Ancestry of Our Moshiach Highlights His Universal Mission

I saw the following thought on the Book of Rus from Rav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik, zt"l.

Rus was the great grandmother of Dovid HaMelech [King David]. Speaking of humble beginnings, there could be no more humble beginning to the Jewish monarchy than tracing one's ancestry to Rus the Moabite. The Jewish people held Moabites in such disregard that male Moabite converts were not allowed to intermarry with the "Congregation of Hashem." And yet, Dovid HaMelech's genealogy is traced back to this daughter of a Moabite King.

Apparently, Rav Soloveitchik said, Rus brought something to Klal Yisrael that was a necessary ingredient for ultimately producing the Moshiach [Messiah]. It is not accidental that Moshiach will stem from Rus. Rus demonstrated extraordinary courage, devotion, and loyalty. Here is a woman who was a princess in her own right. When widowed by the death of Naomi's son, she was left

penniless. Now she had a decision to make: "Do I go back to the palace or do I go to a foreign land where the prospects of me marrying again are next to nothing?"

Despite all this, her devotion to her mother-in-law, her foresight and her strength (Gevurah), enabled her to make a most heroic and courageous decision. She returned to the Land of Israel and to Klal Yisrael with her elderly mother-in-law. The traits of courage and heroism displayed by Rus are personality ingredients that will be needed by the Moshiach.

Moshiach also descends from two other women, the first of whom was the daughter of Lot. Thinking that after their escape from the destruction of Sodom, she, her sister, and her father were the only three living survivors on the planet, Lot's daughter did something that was despicable. She had relations with her own father. But the motivation behind this act was a desire to save the world. She did what she did because she thought that otherwise the world would come to an end and she felt she had to act to save humanity. This attribute of self-sacrifice for the purpose of saving the world is a noble one. This too is a necessary ingredient in the Moshiach, who must possess a pressing urge to save mankind.

The third woman from whom the Moshiach stems is Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Yehudah. Her first two husbands died. She was relegated to a position of "who knows what is going to be with me." She waited patiently until she was able to have a child with Yehudah. She, too, foreshadows a desirable trait for the Moshiach: The attribute of patience.

The Moshiach is waiting to come. He must have Job-like patience, two thousand years of patience or more may be necessary -- until we are on the level when we will be worthy of his coming.

The courage of Rus, the patience of Tamar, and the desire to save the world as manifested by Lot's eldest daughter - are all necessary ingredients for producing a Moshiach. The irony is that all three of these women were not Jewish. This fits in with the idea that the role of the Moshiach -- in spite of the fact that he is going to be OUR Moshiach -- will not be limited to the Jewish nation. He will have a universal effect on the entire planet. "And Hashem will be King over the entire world and on that day Hashem will be One and His Name will be One" [Zecharia 14:9].

Therefore, it is not a coincidence that the spiritual gene pool, from which Moshiach will descend, will also include genes from members of the nations of the world. Moshiach's job will not only be to bring back Jews to where they have to be, but also to bring back the entire world - Jews and Gentiles alike - so that everyone will recognize that G-d is One and His Name is One.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#330). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Sefer Rus and Its Halachic Implications. The complete list of halachic portions for this

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