

DEPARTURE OF ISRAEL'S PEACE-MAKER TRIGGERS CANNANITE ATTACK

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Chukas

Departure of Israel's Peace-maker Triggers Cannanite Attack

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape #18, Rending Garments on Seeing Yerushalayim. Good Shabbos!

This week's parsha contains the death of Aharon haKohen. The pasuk [verse] states that the Cannanite King had been afraid to start up with Bnai Yisroel until this point. However, now he heard something (Vayishma haCannani...) that caused him to wage war with Israel.

The Talmud in tractate Rosh Hashannah explains that he heard that Aharon haKohen had died. Aharon's death caused the Clouds of Glory to depart. The Cannanite King took this as a signal that he had permission to wage war against Bnai Yisroel. What was it about the loss of Aharon that now made the Jewish people vulnerable to attack from their enemies?

The Ateres Mordechai quotes the teaching of the Sages: Aharon haKohen was a Rodef Shalom [pursuer of peace], who preserved peace in Klal Yisroel. Once Aharon was gone, machlokes [arguments] and fights began. Therefore, Bnai Yisroel became vulnerable to attack from outside.

The Ateres Mordechai further connects this idea with the pasuk in parshas Lech-Lecha: "There was a quarrel between the shepherds of Avram and the shepherds of Lot. And the Cannani was then in the land."

What is the significance of the "Cannani was then in the land?" The Ateres Mordechai notes that this is the same idea that we find here in our parsha: As long as there was peace between the shepherds of Avram and Lot, their unity was a guarantee of protection from external enemies; but as soon as quarrels broke out, there was a cause for worry about the Cannani being in the land.

When there are quarrels among the Jewish people, they become vulnerable to attack from external enemies.

Aharon's Death Triggers Even Greater Emotions Than Moshe's Death

Aharon loved and pursued peace. Chazal consider this a very important concept. The Yalkut Shimoni says that when it came time for Aharon to die, G-d, kaviyachol [so to speak], did not have it within Him to go to Aharon and tell him directly that his time was up. G-d asked Moshe Rabbeynu for a favor, to tell Aharon to go up to his place of death.

Rav Bergman, in his sefer, Shaare Orah, points out that there is no such teaching regarding the time for Moshe Rabbeynu to die. There is not any indication that G-d was, kaviyachol, embarrassed to tell Moshe Rabbeynu that the time had come for him to leave this world. In what way was Aharon superior?

Rav Bergman suggests it was Aharon's attribute of being the pursuer of peace among the Jewish nation that gave him this special status.

Aharon's Method of Making Ba'lei Teshuva: Smiles not Stones

The Avos D'Rav Nasson echoes this same theme. When Aharon dies, the pasuk says that the entire House of Israel (implying men and women) mourned. However, when Moshe dies, the pasuk states that the Children of Israel (implying the men only) mourned.

The relationship between Klal Yisroel and Moshe Rabbenu was not the same as between Klal Yisroel and Aharon. Moshe had to give mussar, had to set the people straight, and had to issue uncompromising judgments.

Aharon, however, never criticized. He was a peacemaker who was beloved by everyone. Aharon would greet wicked people with a smile. He did not spit or throw stones. He said "Good Morning." The response of the wicked, often was, "How can I continue to sin, it will distress Aharon?" The Medrash declares that in this way "he caused many people to repent from doing evil." He caused them to repent, not through anger or disgust, but with Shalom. That is how he was so successful.

Mr. Harry Wolpert, a long time supporter of Torah causes in Baltimore, had been a student of Rabbi Baruch Ber Lebovitz, the Kaminetzer Rosh Yeshiva. When Mr. Wolpert came to Baltimore in the early 1900s, he repeatedly faced the nisayon [test; challenge] of Chillul Shabbos [Shabbos Desecration]. Today, we do not need to face the common nisayon of those years -- "If you don't come in on Saturday, don't bother coming Monday."

Mr. Wolpert related that he faced this temptation many times when he needed to support his wife and children. What stopped him from succumbing to the temptation? It was the image of his Rebbe, Reb Baruch Ber. Reb Baruch Ber was known as a Rebbe who loved his students. Reb Baruch Ber cherished each student. This love, shown to a student, was what stopped Mr. Wolpert from becoming a Mechalel Shabbos [violator of the Shabbos].

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. The complete list of halachic portions for this parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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