

YAAKOV RECOGNIZED THAT WITHOUT UNITY, THE JEWISH PEOPLE HAVE NO HOPE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Korach

Yaakov Recognized That Without Unity, The Jewish People Have No Hope

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 730 -- Divergent Minhagim in One Shul. Good Shabbos!

The blessings Yaakov gave his children in Parsha Vayechi contain the words, "Shimon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence their kinship. Let my soul not come into their council; into their assembly let my glory not be united; for in their anger they slew men and in their self-will they uprooted oxen." [Bereshis 49:5-6]. Rashi there mentions that Yaakov's prayer not to have "his glory united with their assembly" was a request not to have the patriarch's name mentioned in the story of Korach. Indeed, the Torah does not mention Yaakov's name in enumerating the lineage of Korach, but traces Korach only back to Levi (Yaakov's son) and no further.

Sefer Bamdibar starting from Parshas Be'Ha'Aloscha through Parshas Balak contains one unfortunate incident after another. [A Jew once came to the Gerer Rebbe and told him that he got depressed every summer. The Rebbe asked what about the summer depressed him -- "Did it have anything to do with the weather?" he wondered. "No", the Chossid explained, "It's the Parshas haShavua -- one week after another we read about the misdeeds of the Jewish people!"] Indeed, there are grievous aveiyros [sins] mentioned throughout Chumash. Apparently, Yaakov Avinu was not worried about all these aveiyros. Yaakov only beseeched that the Torah not mention his name by the aveyro of Korach. What is so incredibly horrible about this story that Yaakov felt so strongly -- even on his deathbed -- that he must not have his name mentioned in connection with it?

Rav Moshe Shapiro, in his book "Mi'mamakim" [Out of the Depths] offers an approach to this question. However, let us preface it with another question: There is a long-standing Jewish custom - - dating from Biblical times -- to greet people with the word "Shalom". We find the practice already in Bereshis: "And he (Yaakov) said, 'Is there Shalom with him (Lavan)?' and they responded 'Shalom'."

[Bereshis 29:6]. We also find this several times in Shoftim [the Book of Judges], for example "And the old man said 'Shalom to you...'" [Shoftim 19:20]. Until this very day, one Jew greets another with the greeting "Shalom Aleichem!" In Eretz Yisrael, one does not greet people on the street by saying "Hi" or "Hello". The classic greeting is "Shalom!" A person may say it perhaps 100 times or more per day.

The Talmud says that Shalom is one of the names of the Almighty [Shabbos 10b]. [The Halacha is in fact that a person may not greet someone (with the term Shalom) in a bathroom. (There is even a question as to whether one may call to a friend whose name is Shalom in the bathroom.)] If this is the case, is it not somewhat flippant and disrespectful to the Name of G-d to repeatedly say "Shalom Aleichem, Shalom Aleichem, Shalom Aleichem"? Normally, there is a prohibition from mentioning G-d's Name for naught. According to some, this prohibition equates with the third of the Ten Commandments -- not taking the L-rd's Name in vain. Normative halacha is that when there is a doubt whether one needs to make a Bracha, he is not allowed to make that Bracha lest he take G-d's Name in vain.

Therefore, we have a paradox here. On the one hand, we are very strict regarding not mentioning G-d's Name without a purpose. And yet the institution of how one Jew greets his fellow Jew has always been to do so by invoking one of the Names of G-d: Shalom.

What happened to the concern of uttering G-d's Name for naught? Not only do we use the Name Shalom used for this purpose, the Gemara states that Boaz instituted that one may greet his neighbor with the formal Name of G-d [Makkos 23b]. What does all this mean?

When we need to give the Sotah [suspected adulteress] the special water to test her fidelity to her husband, we take G-d's Name, write it on a piece of earthenware, throw it in the water and erase it. The Talmud says, "My name that was written in holiness shall be erased upon the waters..." in order to bring peace between husband and wife [Shabbos 116a]. The simple interpretation of this is that for the purposes of establishing Shalom Bayis [domestic harmony] between husband and wife, G-d even allows the erasing of His Name.

The Maharal, in his Nesivos Olam, gives a different interpretation to this halacha. When a husband and wife are living in peace, the Shechinah [Divine Presence of G-d] dwells amongst them. When there is disharmony between husband and wife, the Shechinah is not there. In other words, when the husband and wife are in dispute with one another, there is already an erasure of G-d's Name. For this reason, G-d says, "Let them use my Name to bring back Shalom Bayis." Such a process does not cause an erasure of My Name and Presence from this world, on the contrary, that process restores the Shechinah!

This too is the reason we may invoke the Name of G-d to say hello to someone. When Jews are at peace with one another, the Shechinah dwells amongst us. When we are not living in peace, the Almighty removes His Presence from amongst us. It is worthwhile to use the Name of G-d to greet someone and be friendly, thereby promoting unity amongst the Jewish people. Jewish unity causes

the Divine Presence to be present amongst us.

This can help us understand the following incident in Chumash: "And Yaakov left Beer Sheva and went to Charan. And he took from the stones of the place." [Bereshis 28:10-11] Miraculously, when he woke up, he took "the (single) stone that he had placed under his head" [28:18]. Rashi notes that he originally took 12 stones and they turned into a single stone. Why did that happen? What is the symbolism of this incident?

The Medrash says that Yaakov knew prophetically that the Jewish people were to be composed of 12 Tribes. Yaakov knew that neither Avraham nor Yitzchak had 12 children, so he assumed that these 12 Tribes would descend from him. Yaakov therefore took the 12 rocks, put them under his head, and sought a Divine sign that he would be able to become the father of the Jewish nation and have 12 tribes descend from him. Yaakov said, "If these stones miraculously merge together and can form a single unit, then I know that I will be able to father 12 Tribes and merge them into a single people." His goal was to build a nation -- to take disparate individuals and blend them into one unit that will bring the Divine Presence into the world. If the 12 stones would come together, then that would be a sign to Yaakov that there could be unity amongst the Jewish people and that a unified Jewish nation could emerge. If the 12 stones would stay separate, Yaakov felt that he would be doomed, because where there is disunity, the Almighty does not allow His Presence to be felt.

Yaakov Avinu thus realized from the outset that unity was the key to survival of the Jewish people -- it is their only hope for survival. He knew that the Divine Presence would only reside with the nation through "achdus". Consequently, Yaakov wanted to have nothing to do with Korach and his disputants. In Yaakov's eyes, their aveyro was worse than that of the Golden Calf and the Spies and the Complainers, and everything else. This aveyro resulted in sowing division and dispute amongst the Jewish people. Korach threatened to destroy all that Yaakov had built. About such an aveyro, Yaakov pleaded, "Let my name and honor not be associated with him." Only through unity will the Children of Yaakov be the eternal nation of Bnei Yisrael.

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