

THE FINAL TEST RUN – PARSHAS VAYEITZEI – R' SHOLOM SEGAL

Rashi, at the end of last week's סדרה, cites the גמרא in מגילה that teaches how יעקב אבינו was punished, measure for measure, for having delayed on his return journey to his parent's home. He had been away from home a total of 36 years, of which the initial 14 had been spent in ישיבת שם ועבר. The תורה provided protection for those 14 years and thus, he was only punished for the remaining 22 years, having יוסף taken from him and only being reunited some 22 years later.

Surely though, this would seem to be very harsh and out of proportion. When רבקה sent him away, she had told him that she would call for him, when matters calmed a little. The message to return home in this week's סדרה, which he actually never received, was not despatched until pretty much the time he left לבן's home. Of the 36 years away, those of תורה were most definitely following the dreams of his dear and righteous parents, whilst those in the house of לבן were following the directives of his father to find his right spouse. Why was he then seen to have disregarded the מצוה of כבוד אב for a full 36 years?

The (א':א'), as implied by the terminology, warns that one who does not wash מים אחרונים prior to ברכת המזון, is allowing the שטן to lay its offences on that meal. The מפרשים are somewhat at a loss how to explain this. However, bearing in mind that one of the reasons for מים אחרונים is the sanctification prior to bentching, it makes full sense. One who displays a lax approach to bentching, reveals that his sole intent in the consumption of the food was so as to satisfy his animalistic desires. The סעודה may have been filled with תורה discourse and זמירות, but the failure at the last hurdle, reveals that the underpinning of the whole meal was far weaker than had previously seemed.

It is true that יעקב אבינו had followed the directives of his parents and was doing what made them most proud. But, all said and done, when he, at his exalted level, delayed in coming home, it revealed that perhaps the whole time had not actually been for the sake of כיבוד אב and thus, it was all held against him. (See יהוידע in בן מגילה who suggests a similar idea.)

With this idea, we may explain a most difficult גמרא in (מ"ב:) סוטה, as explained by רש"י and the יעב"ץ. Due to קבלת התורה having taken so long, a full 40 days following מתן תורה, Goliath was given the strength to stand and taunt כלל ישראל for the same length of time. What are we to make of this?

Imagine a חתן and כלה standing under the חופה. As you're smiling and thinking to yourself how perfect they are for one another, the חתן smashes the glass and the jubilant cries of מזל טוב reverberate around the hall and then ... as the music is about to begin ... the כלה turns and slaps the חתן across the face! The whole שמחה has been shattered into a million pieces and the חופה is history. When the finale goes sour, namely when כלל ישראל failed with the חטא of the עגל, all 40 days of קבלת התורה were destroyed and held against them.

Interesting to note is the pattern that emerges from an examination of all major pivotal moments in history; namely, there is always one final test run, to check that all is in order, before the release of the big moment. For example, אברהם was to undergo מילה, perfecting and completing himself and his connection with G-D, in order that he could continue on to father the next link in the chain.

Prior to יצחק's marriage to רבקה, the foundations of the next stage in the birth of כלל ישראל was forced to undergo the tenth and final test. The עקדה would put him through the most trying assessment of his אמונה and would put the final touches to the moulding of the perfect second link in the chain. יצחק was hereafter referred to as an עולה תמימה, a perfect sacrifice.

Before leaving מצרים, the Jewish Nation was commanded to sacrifice the קרבן פסח, none less than the very animal which their cruel taskmasters worshipped. Moreover, they were to publicise their activities. Would their faith stand up to the test?

סוף קריעת ים סוף was the next major moment in the building of our relationship with Hashem. Their enemies were fast approaching from behind and the crashing waves of the Red Sea were looming in front. It required a leap of faith, before which they merited the salvation and revelation of G-D in a manner that surpassed even the visions of the greatest prophets.

So far, they had passed all the tests with flying colours and had arrived safe and sound at מתן תורה. They were on the verge of entry into ארץ ישראל and perhaps even the final גאולה. But now came yet a further final trial run and this time ... they failed. The עגל proved that the system was not fool-proof and still needed to be further adapted and strengthened. This has been the story of the topsy-turvy journey ever since.

There is absolutely no doubt that the events we are witnessing in today's modern world, be it the global financial turmoil or the violence that is engulfing the world, are clear warnings of the final days. The times we are enduring are trying, to say the least. If we are to bring an end to the suffering and more importantly free the שכינה of its צער in גלות, we must stand strong in our faith and brave the storms. The system is hopefully undergoing its final test run and בעזרת ש"ת, this will prove that all systems are go and ready for take-off.