

He slaughtered sacrifices to the G-d of his father, Yitzchak. (46:1)

Yaakov *Avinu* was moving to Egypt. Although he knew quite well that his ultimate home would be *Eretz Yisrael* and that Egypt was a *galus*, exile, which he would have to endure – the move to Egypt was not an easy one. *Galus* has a transformative effect on a person. Some feel the need to adapt, to eschew past practices and beliefs. Otherwise, how can they survive in an environment that is foreign to them? Yaakov taught his children to remain focused on the future, on their return to the Holy Land, on their eventual redemption. With hope, one can survive the purgatory of *galus*. Without hope, one cannot even make it through the first day.

With this idea in mind, we may understand something that Yaakov did on his way to Egypt – an action that, on the surface, seems enigmatic: *Va'yizbach zevachim l'Elokai aviv Yitzchak*; “He slaughtered sacrifices to the G-d of his father, Yitzchak.” It seems to me that Yaakov also had a grandfather, Avraham *Avinu*, who had achieved fairly notable distinction. Why did Yaakov offer sacrifices to the G-d of his father, Yitzchak, and not to (the same) G-d of Avraham?

This question appears in the *Midrash*, accompanied by an answer that is quite unusual. Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says, “I went around to all of the *Aggadah* (non- *Halachah*) experts of the Torah in the south of *Eretz Yisrael*, asking them to explain this *pasuk* to me, and no one provided me with an answer to my question.” Nonetheless, the *Midrash* offers a number of answers to elucidate why Yaakov chose to offer sacrifices specifically to the G-d of Yitzchak.

The last answer given by the *Midrash* will serve as our point of reference. *Chazal* say, “We view the ashes of Yitzchak *Avinu* as if they are piled up on top of the *Mizbayach*, Altar.” In one of his *seudah shlishis shmuessen*, talks, **Horav Shlomo Freifeld, zl**, explains the concept of *ro'im*, “we view.” When we study the *parsha*, chapter, of the *Akeidah*, Binding of Yitzchak, through the lens of our physical, three-dimensional vision, we see that Avraham did not actually slaughter Yitzchak, but instead, he slaughtered an *ayil*, ram. *Chazal* teach *ro'im*, “we view/look” differently. The spiritual perspective is one of *nitzchiyus*; it is eternal, non-restrictive, without boundaries. Through the prism of *nitzchiyus*, Yitzchak was actually slaughtered, sacrificed as a *Korban Olah*, Elevation/Burnt Offering – and his ashes are laying on top of the *Mizbayach*! While this *Midrash* is both inspirational and poignant, how does it explain why Yaakov offered his sacrifices to the G-d of Yitzchak?

Rav Freifeld explains this most beautifully, employing his inimitable manner of getting to the point and focusing on what is important to the believing Jew. His *divrei Torah* were lessons in Torah-life and living. There is a phenomenon in history called *galus*, exile. We Jews have been experiencing the effects of *galus*, having endured it for the last two thousand years. Under normal circumstances, any nation that experiences *galus* becomes dismantled, broken down, to individuals living without direction, unfocused, divested of its pride, its unity dissembled. In short, a nation in

exile is, for all intents and purposes, destroyed. This is axiomatic – without exception: Every nation that has been exiled has lost its semblance of nationhood. Its language, its customs, its traditions, its culture, are all absorbed, and eventually erased, by its surrounding host nation's culture. There is one exception to this sociological rule: *Klal Yisrael*. Throughout every *galus* that we have experienced, not only have we survived physically, but our culture, spiritual affiliation and Jewish religious identity have thrived! Why is this? Why are we the exception to the rule? *Titein emes l'Yaakov*; Our Patriarch Yaakov was concerned about the *emes*, unabashed truth. He knew what exile can do to a person, to a nation, and he knew very well that there was only one antidote to the allure of our host culture: *emes*.

Yaakov *Avinu* was acutely aware that, if we view *galus* through a three-dimensional perspective, we are finished. It is only when we live by the concepts relegated by *nitzchiyus*, eternity, that our world-view changes. We view reality through a different lens, the lens of eternal truth. Thus, our Patriarch made sure that our perspective was one of *ro'im*, eyes which penetrate far beyond the world of three dimensions.

We live in a world bound by the allure of Madison Avenue, which is the antithesis of *emes*. It is all about convincing the unassuming consumer that he must change; nothing is of value if it is a year old. Styles, both in clothing and lifestyle, are conjured up by an artist whose mood, affliction or addiction determines his ideas. It is all about what we see through our three-dimensional vision.

These attitudes present the antithesis of *emes*, the obverse of truth in the eternal sense. The Torah Jew looks beyond the temporal. He must view everything around him through the spectrum of *nitzchiyus*. This can only be achieved by connecting inextricably through *emes*. The pioneers who built Torah in America were visionaries who viewed this negative scenario surrounding them through the lens of *nitzchiyus*. True, based upon three-dimensional vision, Torah development in America was hopeless, an impossible dream, unachievable through conventional means. This did not faze them. They looked through the lens of *emes*, beyond physical appearances. Jewish children require a Jewish education. Nothing would stand in their way.

This is the Torah view. I had occasion recently to read an article by a member of one of the secular streams of Judaism who was proudly lauding another one of their religious travesties. While the repugnance of their insult to the Torah is too reprehensible to even commit to paper, my purpose is to paraphrase their opinion concerning why Judaism (their brand) has survived this exile: "Judaism is an evolving religious civilization... It is a faith in constant motion and ever-changing... We have survived because we have adapted and acknowledged that faith and religion must bend and respond to modernity." From a Torah perspective, the above statement is heretical. From a purely Jewish perspective, I wonder exactly what they are doing that is inherently Jewish.

When one lives with *sheker*, falsehood, he sees things the way he wants to see them, through the subjective lens of three-dimensional vision. Reality has nothing to do with eternity, and Jewish identity has nothing to do with Judaism. Yaakov *Avinu* saw the tragedy of secularism; thus, he

offered sacrifices to the G-d of Yitzchak whose “ashes” we do not see – but we know are there!

An individual who viewed life through the lens of spirituality, to whom *emes* was a way of life – not an overused cliché was Horav **Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, zl**, the legendary architect of Torah in America. Veritably, brief vignettes culled from his many aphorisms hardly do justice to this giant of truth. He would exhort his *talmidim*, students, “Put on the glasses of Torah, look at the world through the lenses of Judaism, for then you will see before you the world and events in an entirely different perspective.”

Rav Shraga Feivel would note that, in Eastern Europe, there was a marked distinction between Jew and gentile. The gentiles with whom the Jew came in contact were, for the most part, illiterate drunkards who were uncouth peasants. Indeed, recitation of the morning blessing, “Who has not made me a gentile,” was quite easy to make. In America, however, the gentile has become a friend, business colleague, refined and cultured. In such an instance, the distinctions blur. Here, Rav Shraga Feivel explained, the task is not to denounce the gentile, but to elevate the Jew, to reveal the richness of the Jewish soul. Indeed, we saw but seventy-five years ago how the German culture produced moralists, philosophers, poets, literary giants. Yet, it did not deter those “distinguished” statesmen, jurists, medical practitioners, scientists and industrialists, from committing monstrosities toward innocent, defenseless men, women and children – whose only “offense” was that they were Jewish.

A Jew learns Torah which edifies him, imbuing his soul with holiness. Torah is much more than a source of knowledge. A Jew who does not reflect his Torah advantage is not learning Torah! We would add that in a non-Jewish world a person who has achieved success in any area, who has distinguished himself in any discipline, will, regardless of his personal behavior, receive honor. Thus, a great mathematician will receive honor, despite his degenerate and perverted personal life. A philanthropist can expect to have his business ethics glossed over, because who cares, as long as he keeps on giving money? A talented artist’s depravity is overlooked because of his genius with the brush. Not so, among the Jews. Of all the recognized and respected thousands of Torah leaders throughout the generations, one will not find anyone who was lacking in good character, without compassion, or who had succumbed to unbridled physical desire.

Rav Shraga Feivel often emphasized that a Jew is defined by his emotional responses no less than by his book knowledge. One may be proficient in the entire *Talmud*, but, if he turns to Shakespeare’s classics as a source of spiritual sustenance, is apathetic to the needs of a fellow Jew, or is deficient in the *kedushah*, sanctity, that refines conduct, he has not yet acquired a Jewish heart.

Rav Shraga Feivel taught his students to view the world through a spiritual lens. In other words, just because an act “seems” appropriate and a law does not happen to prohibit it, it does not mean that the particular act upholds the standard of Torah. He once discovered that the Torah Vodaath Ladies Auxiliary had been raising money through the medium of card parties (a not unheard of

practice in those days – I guess much like Bingo, years past), which generated funds for a host of institutions. He commented, “You probably think that money raised in this fashion will purchase bricks like any other bricks, and, with them, we will be able to build a building for Torah like any other building. If you put on spiritual glasses and view the building created by those bricks, however, you would see that it is filled with holes where those bricks have been placed.”