

Then there came the fugitive and told Avram, the Ivri. (14:13)

Avraham *Avinu* is given the appellation *Ivri*, which *Chazal* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 42:8) explain that because the entire world was *mei'ever echad*, on one side, and he (stood his ground) on the other side. *Ivri* is derived from *ever*, side. Our Patriarch's essence and greatness are based upon his readiness to stand apart from the rest of the world. The entire world population served idols. He refused to fall in line with popular thinking. He did not care what the surrounding culture viewed as vogue. He was prepared to suffer isolation, if necessary, in order to adhere to his beliefs. The truth meant something to him, even if the rest of the world had absconded to falsehood. Popular does not make something right. Sadly, we often gravitate toward acceptance and popularity, even if it means compromising our integrity.

Our Torah values must guide our actions. They should be the foundation of our principles in life. Integrity should override fear of others' perceptions or the anticipation of outcomes. We act in accordance with what is right and true even if it is unpopular or seems to produce negative consequences. Moral courage is the motif of *Ivri*, the ability to stand firm for what is right, even if it might cost us a few friends.

In his commentary to *Shemos* (3:18), *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*, observes that, when Moshe *Rabbeinu* first approached Pharaoh with regard to releasing the Jews from bondage, he said, *Elokai halvrim shalachani*, "The G-d of the Ivrim sent me." Moshe intimated that every Jew (regardless of his station in life or hierarchy within the varied rungs of the community ladder) must have within himself the capacity to be an *Ivri* – to stand alone without fear of reprisal or lack of popularity. Hashem does not require multitudes; He wants Jews who are committed to His principles and precepts.

When the passengers on the boat on which Yonah *HaNavi* was traveling realized that the storm at sea was no ordinary storm, they questioned the passengers to ascertain whether any of them might be deserving of such punishment. Why should they all suffer on account of one man? Yonah replied, *Ivri anochi v'es Hashem Elokai haShamayim ani yarei*, "I am an *Ivri*, and I fear the G-d of the Heaven." This is all that he said. He need not say more. He took responsibility for the storm. He was like Avraham *Avinu*, who went to battle against an enemy that was exponentially larger in numbers than his rag-tag army, simply because it was the right thing to do.

The indomitable Jewish spirit has been bequeathed to us from Avraham *Halvri*. We continue to stand against the world, and, when the going gets rough, we dust ourselves off and continue our journey – until it ends with the advent of *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*. It is the *Ivri* within each of us that has caused our enemies to tremble – first with anger and then with fear. Whether it was Nimrod, Eisav, or Amalek in its various forms – both religious and antisemitic until its most recent manifestation during the Holocaust, our spirit has survived and thrived.

The human spirit is as eternal as its Divine Creator. The tenacious martyrs of the Holocaust proved this. They could destroy our bodies, but our faith and spirit continue. You cannot take the *Ivri* out

of Avraham – or his descendants. Our Torah leaders throughout the generations have not only encouraged the resilience of the spirit, but they have personally exemplified it.

In one incident, a number of malicious Nazi officers beat the saintly *Klausenberger Rebbe*, *zl*, to the brink of consciousness. He endured seemingly endless, vicious blows at the hands of these insidious anti-Semites. Finally, they asked the battered and bloodied *Rebbe* if after all of this suffering, he still believed that the Jews are G-d's chosen people. With whatever strength he had left, he straightforwardly declared, "Yes!"

This infuriated the Nazi. What audacity to maintain such obstinacy after being beaten to within an inch of his life. They beat the *Rebbe* more and more. After a few blows, the Nazi asked, "Do you still believe that you are the chosen people?" When the *Rebbe* answered in the affirmative, the Nazi continued beating. Finally, frustrated that they could not break the *Rebbe's* spirit, the Nazi sneered, "Look at you! You are laying on the ground – broken, bloodied, in pain and barely alive, yet you call yourself chosen! How could even you believe this? Is this your idea of chosen?"

The *Rebbe* gathered whatever strength he could muster and said, "As long as I am laying here declaring my indomitable, unwavering faith in my G-d and my principles, while you stand there doing your fiendish work, I am indeed a member of the chosen people."

We measure our closeness through the Heavenly barometer. As long as Hashem values us, we are *Ivrim*, chosen and valued. What the world thinks of us -- whether it is the rabid anti-Semites who cannot tolerate our resilience and success or it is the uncouth, unintelligent boors who follow and accept however their leadership manipulates -- has absolutely no credence and carries no weight in how we should view ourselves. We are here today because Hashem values us. That is really all that counts.