

Parshas Vayaira - the Deal and the Dual

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Words, swords. The U.S. administration demand to stop building homes in Yehuda and Shomron is an about face change from the policy of previous administrations, going back to the Six Day War. 1967. The words are really swords, camouflaging the eventual demands to force three hundred thousand Jews out of their homes, built by sweat and painful toil, and hand it to enemies who teach their children the "good deed" of killing Jews.

Following that "Blitz Victory" in 1967, the Israeli government publicly declared Yehuda and Shomron belonging to the Jewish people on religious-historic grounds. It was clearly stated that the territories regained in the Six Day War were "liberated" and belong to the Jewish people, as promised by G-d in the Torah. This Biblical testimony, giving the Jewish people title to the land, is the strongest, if not the only, real claim to the Holy Land. The Jewish people, it was argued were not at liberty to tamper with this divine right.

Is there room for self scrutiny blaming ourselves for the weakening of the once sympathetic view of Israel in the eyes of the nations, regarding Yehuda and Shomron?

It is obvious that employing the above principle demands much self examination. To what extent is Jewry committed to the Chumash in other areas of life? In order for our claim to have resonance, all of life must be permeated with the teachings of the same Torah. The more Jews generally think in Biblical-religious terms, and the more life in Israel and in the diaspora is steeped in genuine Torah Jewishness, the more the strategy of holding on to the territories is justified.

There are two striking statements of the sages relating to the Akaidah (Braishis 22:1-19), one speaking of a Deal, and the other of of a Duel, which seems most relevant to the current contention between the Jewish people on one hand, and the Arab states on the other, with the world tilted toward the other. The Akaidah begins " And it came to pass after these things, that G-d did prove Abraham... And He said; Take now thy son...Isaac, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him..." The phrase "and it came to pass after these things" always implies a close connection with what has occurred earlier. Says the Rashbam: "It refers to the covenant with Abimelech." It is the deal Abraham made with Abimelech, concerning the land, postponing claim to it until four generations elapse (21:23). This angered G-d. The land is the precious gift given to the Israelites; it was not for Abraham to intermeddle with the procedures.

As a punishment, "G-d grieved". Abraham (so rendering "Nissah - 22:1) by telling him to offer his son as a sacrifice.

The Rashbam's comments based on Tana Dvair Eliyahu Rabba, end of ch. 7, who connects the tests of Akaidah to the transaction, and Braishis Rabba 54:4, which speaks of punishment of Abraham because of the transaction. Another rabbinic statement shows, furthermore, that even for the purpose of avoidance of war, and secure boundaries, the obligation to hold on to the Almighty's gift should be reckoned with. The Midrash Shmuel, ch.12, declares that as punishment for Abraham's transaction the descendants of Abimelech waged war against Israel and emerged victorious, (see also Midrash Agadah Braishis 21:28)

In religious-security terms, then, holding on to divinely promised territory is the best guarantee. This is so, however, provided there is widespread general "holding on" to the principles of Torah. This leads to the second text of the Midrash, about the Duel.

The Midrash states that before the Akaidah a duel took place between Yitzchok and Yishmael. Said Yishmael to Yitzchok: I am more praiseworthy for I was circumcised at the age of thirteen. when I was able to object, but you were circumcised on the eighth day (a helpless infant). Replied Yitzchok: " If G-d should ask me to give my whole life for Him I would not hesitate." It is this that the passage "after these words" refers to. Now that Yitzchok expressed readiness, it is time to test Abraham. (Braishis Rabba 55:4 Targum Jonathan 22:1)

It is taught that the experiences of the ancestors are signs for their descendants. It may be assumed that this duel between Yitzchok and Yishmael, too, is fraught with meaning for future generations, i.e. our generation, when the descendants of the two confront each other most boldly and directly. The Akaidah is central in Jewish religious life not only to accord everlasting remembrance to the merit of the self - sacrifice, but also to remind us of the need, even today, to prove ourselves. There is no need to demonstrate the superiority of the present Yitzchoks over the present Yishmaels in morals and ethics, in matters of faith and spirit. The Tov ShebeGoyim among Yishmael's descendants is still one which "Yodo Bakol", hand against all, (Braishis 16:12) even their own. The Jewish people, in contrast, in Israel as well as abroad, even from a most critical viewpoint, is the most righteous, ethical and principled in the whole world, with it's billions spent for Tzedakah, it's loyalty and concern for one another as basic Torah observance. And yes, even the not as yet fully Torah observant, are nevertheless truly "Rachmonim Bnei Rachmonim", merciful descendants of the merciful. Even today, when the U.N. Goldstone report came out with the charge of crimes in the Gaza War in the beginning of this civil year, it is

expected that there will be a thorough requital of this charge.

Yet the story of the Akeidah, one conjectures, challenges the Yitzchoks of today to prove themselves worthier than the First Yishmael. When Yishmael shows at the age of thirteen a fulfillment of an important Mitzvah, and considering that according to the Zohar,(Vayara 32a) Arab contemporary occupation of the Land was a reward for that observance at that age - we must endeavor to attain superiority in Mitzvos and observance beginning with Bar Mitzvah age, and continuing to the last day of life.

While thousands of young adults study at Yeshivos, and more thousands of Baali Batim study the Daf Yomi, it is still the vast majority in Jewry whose Jewish education finishes with the Bar Mitzvah ceremony, following which most is forgotten. It was told of a loyal Torah student, comparing him with a descendant of tzaddikim who abandoned the Yeshiva: "His Yichus begins with him, while the other's end with him. How disheartening when the first Yishmael began his loyalty at the age of thirteen coming to see Jewish children cease their study and observance at that age. "Educate the lad according to his way (ability), also when he gets older he will not depart from it." (Mishlai 22:6). A child's education has meaning only when carried over to mature adult life.

The two rabbinic statements on the introduction to the Akaidah merge into one paramount guideline for our time. It should be borne in mind, as the pressures mount upon Israel to give away portions of it's G-d given land, that once before in history Abraham transacted the land temporarily to an outsider, resulting in heavy losses, real Akaidahs. However in resisting the pressures, and relying on the Biblical claim as also a source of strength and security, we must prove ourselves worthy by a complete return to mature study and observance of Torah. A new direction toward genuine Torah learning and observance en mass will surely give the Jewish State the broader borders, while the security will come not from the horizontal stretch, but from the vertical reach, from the One Above.

Good Shabbos