

Mussar HaTorah

Torah Insights into Human Nature – Dedicated in memory of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l

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Parashas Vayigash

“... AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL CARRIED JACOB THEIR FATHER...” (BEREISHIS 46:5)

They will need the attributes of Yisrael

THREE WEEKS AGO, in parashas Vayishlach, (ibid. 32:26) we read how Yaakov fought with the angel of Esav. The angel gave Yaakov the name Yisrael to signify that Yaakov could fight – and triumph over – man and angel. Now, as Yaakov and his family were travelling to Egypt – and beginning a tortured exile – they are referred to by the Torah as, the “Children of Israel.” The S’forno explains that the name “B’nei Yisrael” is used for the first time because now, as they were leaving for Egypt, they will need the attributes of Yisrael to, “lord over angels and man.”

The name Yisrael connotes a stately power of being able vanquish any foe, be it man or even an angelic being. However, at this moment, the family of Yaakov was leaving their homeland bound for two centuries of enslavement, of torture, bondage and death in a foreign land. Would they be able to feel this majestic power while being forced to build the cities of Pisom and Ramses under the whip of the Egyptian taskmasters? Furthermore, the name Yisrael was meant to refer to the Jewish nation, not only for the Egyptian exile, but for the rest of history. During these two thousand years of exile, persecution and mass murder, are we able to feel that we can fight with angels – and win?

This royalty runs in our blood

Perhaps the most deeply ingrained awareness in the hearts of the Jewish people is the knowledge of their nobility, their unique princely status as children of Hashem. Even though we endure periods of exile, when we have been expelled from His land and His palace, we remain royalty – the sons and daughters of the King of kings. This royalty runs in our blood so powerfully that we can feel our stateliness even in the most distressing times and in the most downtrodden positions. The children of Yaakov realized where they were headed, but they still understood – and felt to their core – that they were “B’nei Yisrael,” the people chosen by Hashem as His special ambassadors to every other nation. Any Jew – at any time, even in a concentration camp with a Nazi boot upon his neck – can look up at his oppressor and feel that, “In truth, I am the chosen one; I am the one lucky enough to be a member of the special Nation. I may be going through a difficult, even torturous, situation; but it does not affect my ability to feel my special relationship with Hashem.”

“The righteous will see and rejoice...”

Rabbi Moshe Prager in *Sparks of Glory* (Artsroll, 1985) recounts: A humble little *shamash* smuggled a shofar into a death camp, organized a *minyan* on Rosh HaShanah, and blew the *shofar*. The guards came running and decided to make a spectacle of the *shamash*. They whipped him endlessly, mercilessly, and all the while he continued chanting the prayers out loud. “The righteous will see and rejoice ... and all wickedness will banish like smoke, for You will have removed the evil kingdom from the earth.”

May we appreciate and feel our true greatness and nobility, and strive to actualize that greatness in all that we do every day, as the children and chosen people of the Master of all Creation.