

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Vayishlach 5769

And he said, “If Esav comes to the first camp and smites it, then the remaining camp will escape.” (32:9)

This parsha is a model for Jewish behavior in exile, and the Gemara and Midrash note how the Jewish people is protected by G-d's plan of settling some of them in one land and some in another land. (See Volume 1.)

The Midrash on Shir Hashirim 2:8 gives a different reason for the scattering of the Jewish people: G-d has decreed that they must be in exile in all 70 nations of the world. If they all stick together, it will take a very long time for them to go to all 70 nations. By spreading apart, Jews fulfill the decree of exile much more quickly:

“The voice of my beloved, behold it has come” (Shir Hashirim 2:8) – this refers to the king moshiach. When moshiach comes and says to the Jewish people, “In this month you will be redeemed,” they will say to him, “Our teacher, king moshiach, how can we be redeemed? Didn't the Holy One, blessed is He, say that He is exiling us under the seventy nations?” And he will give them two answers: “One of you goes into exile in Barbary and another of you goes into exile in Sumatra (in the Pesikta Rabasi the text reads: Britain), and it will be considered as if you all went to these places.” The second answer is, “The government appoints local governors from various nations. If one Cuthean, for instance, becomes a ruler over the Jews, although the central government may not be Cuthean, it is considered as if the Jewish people were in exile under the Cuthean people.

In the early 1920's, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchok Schneersohn, wrote a fiery pamphlet opposing the Agudath Israel because of their support of settlement in Eretz Yisroel. What follows is an excerpt from that pamphlet, in which he refers to the above Midrash:

“The spirit of G-d rests on you [Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter, the Gerrer Rebbe] to answer those who ask where to move, that they should move to the Holy Land and build their businesses there. G-d has helped you and you have a large Jewish community who submit their questions to you, and some of them will do nothing without your direction. Tell them to go to America or England, but not to take it upon themselves to go to the holy place, bringing their business with them.

“I do not mean to stick my head among great mountains, to criticize the way a holy man answers questions. A holy man does not base his answers only on his limited human understanding, but on inspiration given to him by G-d. And after all, do Jews ask him questions because of his wisdom, his understanding or his broad knowledge? They have chosen him as their holy man, to hear through him the counsel of G-d in every matter, great or small, be it the service of G-d, health, business matters, raising children or lifestyle. They hope for his answer and blessing as the farmer hopes for rain. Therefore it is senseless to criticize such a man's answer, to evaluate it, or to compare it with the answers given by others.

“However, it is easy to see why a personal answer given to an individual cannot be a basis to decide the question of settling the land. Everyone knows that it is more comfortable for a Jew to live in Eretz Yisroel, breathing the holy air,

living together with religious Jews – than to be breathing the smoke from the chimneys of the British factories or entering the race for profit of the American business world. So when you tell a person to move to Eretz Yisroel and then add logical reasons, you are talking not only from Divine inspiration but from your own opinion; you are guiding people in the proper Torah way, being wise and seeing the outcome of your advice.

“If one travels around the world and looks at Jewish communities, he will see that, thank G-d, the Jewish people is alive and well. Although our enemies (who intend to be enemies but are actually benefactors) persecute us, yet every city has a cheder, a yeshiva and charity organizations. When a religious Jew comes to a new place and gets settled, he will, with the encouragement of gedolim, help build one of these institutions. As the Midrash says (on Shir Hashirim 2:8), when one Jew lives in Barbary and another lives in Britain, it is considered as if the whole Jewish people went to these places and this fulfills the decree of exile to the seventy nations. We must believe with complete faith that when Moshiach comes, he and Hashem will be more pleased with the cheder, the shul and the charity institution founded by the Jews in exile, in Barbary and Britain, than with the factory and workshop founded, G-d forbid, in Jerusalem the holy city. What will you have to say for yourself then?

“You say that the religious Jews in Eretz Yisroel are very good in their dress and behavior. It is very hard to say this, but the appeal of settling the land seems to have blinded your eye. For the sake of this good thing – that Jews should be able to wear Jewish clothing and peyos – have you decided to overlook everything else? If only you could use your strength to take other actions, to make sure that all religious Jews in whatever places they live are perfect, you would bring about improvement without causing ruin to the beauty of the Jewish people.”

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