

From the desk of Rabbi Baumann



Erev Shabbos Parashas Vayeeqash 5780

Dear Parents,

We spoke last week of the need for a nuanced approach to our non-Jewish neighbors. In light of recent events targeting Jews and Jewish institutions in our country, it would certainly be helpful to get a perspective in understanding what might be underlying these events and perhaps a glimpse as to what message *Hashem* may be sending us. During our long and bitter *Galus*, we have been in uncertain situations many times, so what we are apparently experiencing is, unfortunately, not something unprecedented.

After receiving and accepting the startling and most welcome news that *Yosef* was still alive, *Yaakov Avinu* lead his family on their journey down to *Mitzrayim* to reunite with *Yosef*. *Hashem* appears to *Yaakov* in a vision to tell him not to fear leaving *Eretz Yisrael* and settling temporarily in Egypt, "...because I will make you into a great nation there." (*Bereishis* 46:3).

The *Seforno* comments that *Hashem* is informing *Yaakov* that were he and his children to stay in *Canaan*, they would end up intermarrying with the local inhabitants and becoming assimilated. However, in Egypt, where "the Egyptians are not able to eat bread together with the Hebrews," *Yaakov's* family would be forcibly separated and thereby not be susceptible to intermarriage. It was only in Egypt that *Yaakov's* family could develop into a separate nation.

It is astounding to think that the great sons of *Yaakov* and their children would be unable to remain distinct and separate from the lowly *Canaanites* surrounding them. With their great *mesorah* from *Avraham*, *Yitzchak* and *Yaakov* it seems unfathomable that merely being in proximity to a welcoming and accepting culture and environment could sway them from their powerful roots. Nevertheless, that is the clear message that the *Seforno* tells us *Hashem* was conveying to *Yaakov*.

The great *chesed* and open and welcoming environment that is America, has unfortunately already swallowed up millions of our fellow Jews. We are both blessed and cursed to live in a country where our rights are protected by law to the same degree as every other citizen. It has stood us in good stead and enabled us to rebuild our world from the ashes of the Holocaust, as this week's magnificent *Siyum HaShas* so amply demonstrated. But the goodness comes with a price; a price that has already been paid by so many of our brothers and sisters who have assimilated and been lost to the Jewish people.

In America, the Jews know how to make *Kiddush*, they do not know how to make *Havdalla*.

Hashem has promised He will not allow the Jewish people to disappear and He takes measures to ensure that. It has been observed that when the Jews fail to separate sufficiently from the surrounding non-Jews, the non-Jews separate themselves from the Jews, many times causing us great pain and suffering. The great European *Rosh Yeshiva*, *Harav Boruch Ber Leibowitz zt'l* who visited the United States in the 1930's is quoted as having said: "In America, the Jews know how to make *Kiddush*, they do not know how to make *Havdalla*." His point was the Jewish community was very open and accepting of

differences among Jews and between Jews and non-Jews. What they failed in was creating the proper barriers and separations from non-Jews, to protect against intermarriage and assimilation.

Without a *Navi*, a prophet, to interpret what is really happening today, we can only conjecture as to *Hashem's* plan. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that *Hashem* is letting us know that we are getting too comfortable in our surroundings, too close with the non-Jewish culture and environment. We are falling short in our *Havdala*, therefore *Hashem* is causing the people around us to decide that the Jews are too integrated, too much a part of them and it's time to make that separation, perhaps painfully.

This message needs to be internalized and transmitted to our children. We already invest heavily in maintaining our distinctiveness. *Shabbos*, *Kashrus*, going to shul, attending *Yeshiva*, are all lifestyle choices we have made and we and our children are okay with it and celebrate it. But, the areas of dress, entertainment, pursuit of pleasure, drive for affluence and immersion in secular knowledge all represent a more subtle challenge to our being a separate people, distinct from those surrounding us.

We all need to continue developing greater pride in the uniqueness that an all-encompassing Torah life engenders, even though being visibly different from those around us may make us somewhat uncomfortable for the moment. The Jews' desire to fit in and be a part of society, is apparently not being reciprocated by the non-Jews. This message is being cruelly thrown at us with increasing frequency. May we and our children heed the message and thereby be protected from the *Havdala* of the *Goyim*. May we be spared further harm.

Best wishes for a comforting and inspiring Shabbos

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