



Parashat Vayishlach - #259

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On the Haftarah... The Decline of the West

[Ovadiah, chapter 1]

In this week's Haftarah we discover that the concept "The Decline of the West" did not originate with the German philosopher, Oswald Spengler, but with the prophet Ovadiah. The prophet obviously does not use the expression "the West," but employs a parallel term from the Hebrew tradition: "Edom." Esav is Edom, i.e. the father of the West. As Rashi explains (on Bereshit 36:43), one of Esav's princes, "Magdi'el," is Rome.

Based on the Tanachic-historical analysis of Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel, it may be that the early Christians were descendants of Edom, who were more-or-less forcibly converted to Judaism by King Herod, whose memory should be besmirched. But even if the genealogical relationship is questionable, it is the spiritual relationship that is important for this discussion, and our Sages clearly identify Edom with Western Culture.

According to our Sages, Ovadiah himself was a righteous convert, a descendant of Edom (Rashi to Ovadiah 1:1). He knew exactly what he was talking about. In the single chapter he bequeathed to us, he relates the ultimate collapse of Edom: "A vision of Ovadiah: Thus said Hashem, G-d, about Edom...Arise, and let us rise up against her in battle. I have made you small among the nations. You are greatly despised. The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the

rock, whose habitation is high, who says in his heart: who can bring me down to earth?...For on that day, says Hashem, I will cause the wise men of Edom to be lost, and understanding from the mountain of Esav...Because of your violence against your (i.e., Edom's) brother Yaakov, shame will cover you, and you will be cut off forever...You should not have looked on the day of your brother's misfortune, and you should not have rejoiced over the children of Yehudah on the day of their destruction" (Ovadia 1:1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 12).

If we return to the philosopher Oswald Spengler, we see that he was pessimistic, and rejected the idea of humanity's advancement. He arrogantly claimed that the Jewish Nation had completed its historical role and was in the process of disappearing from the earth's stage. He emphasized that there is an essential contrast between the Nation of Israel and the German nation – the latter being the point of Edom's sword. According to his opinion, there would be an unavoidable collision between the young German culture, rooted in its land, and the senile, cosmopolitan, homeless Jewish culture. But amazingly, as revealed each day before the nations of the world, the three-thousand year old Nation, despite its suffering and Exile, has the youthfulness which allows it to be reborn in its Land, while Europe is in a process of dissolving and being consumed by despair.

The Decline of the West will occur not because human history will stumble, but on the contrary, because it will succeed.

Rav Aviner on... A Friend Is a Friend

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Vayetze 5773 – translated by R. Blumberg]

What is a friend? A friend is someone you can always rely on, under any circumstances. He's always there with you when you need him, when you get married and when you get divorced, whether you are healthy or sick, when you are leading an upright life, but also when you are in jail. He may not agree with what you have done, but he will still be with you, and when you get out, he will be waiting for you there with a garland of flowers.

Friendship is a covenant. It is something very precious in the world that makes G-d very happy. I'm not really thinking about friends who we have for our own personal benefit, although that too can be good: Watch over me and I will watch over you; mine is yours, but in exchange, yours is mine. The best however, is friendship without keeping score. Eternal friendship.

And it isn't easy. Pirke Avot (1:6) therefore says, "Acquire a friend for yourself". Not, "Choose a friend for yourself", but "Acquire a friend for yourself", because with friendship, you've got to invest.

Rambam, in his commentary on the Mishnah, quotes from Aristotle's "Virtues and Vices": "A friend is an extension of oneself. You and your friend are soul mates", and he distinguishes three types of friendships:

1. Friendships of utility. I am your friend because I benefit from our friendship - like business partners. Those are not really friendships, because when a person begins to lose out he announces that the friendship is over.

2. Friendships of pleasure. These, themselves, can be divided into two groups:

- Friends to have fun with. This can be like males and females who go together to have fun. It goes without saying that marriage is something different. Obviously, people have fun in marriage as well, but “having fun” is not the beginning and end of the relationship. Quite the contrary, one can wed only after he completes “friendship school”. Only then is one entitled to register in the Higher Friendship Academy, as the Prophet Malachi said (2:14): “She is your partner and covenanted spouse.” Obviously, one need not be perfect at friendship before marrying - otherwise, we would never wed. Rather, we should be reasonably capable, and then we can set out on a shared journey. It’s like when the army commander calls out, “Troops, we’re going into battle immediately! We’ll organize ourselves as we move.”

- Security friendships. This refers to someone I can trust. I don’t have to be careful about everything I do or every word I say, lest he use it against me. He knows everything I do, without my having to fear that he will give me away.

3. Friendships of the good. This refers to friendships based on the great ideal of goodness. This is what we were commanded to acquire: “Acquire for yourself a friend.” It is a friendship that includes morality. Aristotle was right when he said that this last type is the true friendship that everyone is looking for (Nichomachean Ethics Chapter 8).

Friendships based on utility, fun or security are liable to have a selfish aspect. The friendship may be based on self-love that is nourished by the mutual relationship. What is the test of true friendship? Conceding in order to be good to the other person. For example, if one friend is convicted of a crime, even though I am totally opposed to what he did, I remain his friend. A more pleasant example is the camaraderie of fellow-soldiers, which is built upon loyalty, trust, and mutual responsibility. A soldier is ready to forego his own welfare for the sake of his buddy, even if it means endangering his own life.

Yes, certainly, it is thanks to friendship that people are cured of exaggerated self-love.

The philosopher Sartre said, “Hell is other people”. We can respond, “Heaven is a friend”. I said that friendship means being saved from one’s exaggerated ego. Therefore, friendship constitutes the entire Torah on one foot (Shabbat 31a). The letters of the Hebrew word “Ahavah” [love] have a numerical value of 13. Mutual love, the word “love” doubled, equals 26, the numerical value of G-d’s name in Hebrew. Thus the Torah said, “Love your fellow as yourself. I am Hashem” (Vayikra 19:18), as is explained in the Sefer Derech Moshe (Day Fifteen).

A friend remains a friend, under any circumstances. If you are someone’s friend, then you will stay with him in his time of trouble, ready always to assist him. Even if he hurts you, you will remain with him. True, such a friend is no angel. He’s just human, with falls and failures. If a person is using scissors with his right hand and he accidentally cuts his left hand, will the left hand then cut the right hand in revenge?! (see the Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 9:4). If your teeth bite your tongue, will you bang your teeth?! (Derech Moshe, *ibid.*).

Now one might say, “To be that loyal in one’s friendships is blind folly!” So be it. I’d be happy to be blind and foolish in that way. The philosopher Erasmus in his work “The Praise of Folly” wrote: “Is it not folly to close one’s eyes to one’s friends’ shortcomings? Indeed it is a threefold or even a fourfold folly, yet that folly is the glue that holds friends together. Why is this? Because we are not dealing with angels, but with simple human beings, each of whom possesses shortcomings. Friendship between people who are almost perfect, almost divine, is boring, gray... and rare. And even that same stolid, somber friendship is fragile and unstable, because with their sharp, penetrating gaze, each friend will immediately discern that the other does possess shortcomings. Obviously, as far as their own shortcomings, they will remain blind. They will not see the can of worms hanging from their neck. Thus, since we are not angels, and there is no human being without faults of greater or lesser severity, and taking into account differences of age and education, misunderstandings, mistakes and all the normal mishaps of life, how can a friendship endure for even a short time, if we are not a bit crazy or at least naïve? Laugh all you want, but those very close friends who stick it out, despite everything, those mildly naïve people, are the ones who build true friendships and make their lives pleasant.” (Erasmus, *ibid.*, Chapter 9).

Now you, dear reader, should accept the truth from him that recorded it. After all, you too are no angel. You too make mistakes, so be patient and easygoing with all your heart.

Heaven help us! People are so egotistical that a true friend represents a real miracle. It is a miracle! If you are a friend only when you enjoy your fellow's company, then you are not a true friend. You are only a friend of yourself.

But if you have a friend, give him what he asks for, when he asks for it. His use of the word "please" should be a magic spell for you. And even when he does not say it, you should know what he needs.

Real friendship is rare, but it exists. It exists within the family, between husband and wife, or just between any two people. It's a real source of joy. Its existence proves that it is possible.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to my teachers and mentors, David and Yonatan, for being our teachers in the School of Friendship, and to you, O G-d, for creating friendship.

Thank you David and Yonatan. Thank you G-d.

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Shut Rabbenu Tam Tefillin

Gedolei Yisrael and Rabbenu Tam Tefillin

Q: Did the Vilna Gaon put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin?

A: No. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin asked his teacher, the Vilna Gaon: "Perhaps I should put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin? I am not asking for Ha-Rav since you wear Tefillin all day long and if you put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin, it would take away from the Mitzvah of wearing Rashi Tefillin which is the main Mitzvah. But I do not wear Tefillin all day, so perhaps it would be worthwhile for me to put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin at a time when I would not be wearing Tefillin anyway." The Vilna Gaon said: "Why are you asking specifically about Rabbenu Tam Tefillin? There are twenty-four [some say: sixty-four] different opinions on the proper way to make Tefillin. Are you going to put on twenty-four [sixty-four] different pairs?!" Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin said: "But Rabbenu Tam Tefillin is special and perhaps they will ask me in the World to Come: why didn't you put them on?" The Vilna Gaon responded: "We do not fulfill Mitzvot for the sake of the World to Come, we fulfill Mitzvot for the sake of serving Hashem." Orchot Chaim Keter Rosh (#11. And the Aderet related that he began to put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin after reading that the Chatam Sofer did so, but he regretted it after learning the Vilna Gaon's opinion. Since he started putting them on, he could not stop doing so. Nefesh David #41). And following the opinion of the Vilna Gaon, Reb Chaim Brisker did not put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin (Shut Teshuvot Ve-Hanhagot vol. 4, p. 425) nor did the Chazon Ish (Orchot Rabbenu vol. 3, p. 193).

Q: Did the Chafetz Chaim put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin?

A: Reb Leib, the son of the Chafetz Chaim, relates that the reason his father put on both Rashi and Rabbenu Tam Tefillin was not because he had lived among Chasidim during the First World War and wished to act as they did, but because of the tractate of the Jerusalem Talmud

that had been "discovered" which mentioned Rabbenu Tam's position. When it later became known that this tractate of the Jerusalem Talmud was a forgery, he continued to put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin since he had already begun to do so (Michtavei Ha-Rav Chafetz Chaim, p. 27. But see other explanations in Meir Einei Yisrael pp. 419-420. A Chasid once asked Ha-Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky why he did not put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin, and he responded that it is not the Lithuanian Minhag. The Chasid said: But the Chafetz Chaim put them on? Ha-Rav Kamenetzky said that the Chafetz Chaim did not put them on until the age of 90, and if he reaches the age of 90 – he'll put them on as well. And that is exactly what he did on his 90th birthday. In the book "Rebbe Yaakov", pp. 424-425).

Q: Did Maran Ha-Rav Kook put on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin?

A: Yes, but in private (Le-Shelosha Be-Elul vol. 1, p. 32 and Tal Ha-Re'eyah, p. 58).

Q: Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah?

A: No, on account of "Yehirut" (religious arrogance – Shulchan Aruch 34:3. Mishnah Berurah #17), unless he did so inconspicuously.

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