

JOSEPH'S GIFTS TO HIS BROTHERS

After the dramatic reunion of Joseph and his brothers, we read that Joseph gave gifts to each of them and to his father.

וְכָל אֶחָד מֵהֶם נָתַן חֲמִישֵׁת בְּשֵׂמֶת וְלִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָתַן שְׁלֹשָׁה מֵאוֹת כֶּסֶף וְלִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָתַן שְׁלֹשָׁה מֵאוֹת כֶּסֶף וְלִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָתַן שְׁלֹשָׁה מֵאוֹת כֶּסֶף

"to all of them he gave, each man, changes of raiment; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of raiment" (Gen. 45:22).

What does the Torah mean to teach us when it relates this story of Joseph's gifts to his brothers? Furthermore, our Rabbis of the Talmud ask:

וְכִי אֵלֶּיךָ בָּרְכוּ וְלֹא עָלֶיךָ בָּרְכוּ
וְכִי אֵלֶּיךָ בָּרְכוּ וְלֹא עָלֶיךָ בָּרְכוּ
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וְכִי אֵלֶּיךָ בָּרְכוּ וְלֹא עָלֶיךָ בָּרְכוּ

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is it possible that Joseph, who himself suffered/grievously because of the favoritism his father showed him, would now repeat the same error and show favoritism to his full brother Benjamin over his other half brothers? They answer

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"Joseph singled out Benjamin for five changes of clothing as a sign that he, Benjamin, would become the ancestor of one who would be endowed by the king with five kinds of royal garments, as it is written: and Mordecai went forth from the presence of the king in royal apparel of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a robe of fine linen and purple (Esther 8:15)."

Yet, is this really an answer to our question? Are we not merely shifting the problem ahead by several centuries and remaining as unclear as we were before? And how does Mordecai fit into the picture of Joseph's gifts? Surely there must be some significant meaning in the words of the Sages of the Talmud that is not immediately apparent to us.

JOSEPH'S GIFTS TO HIS BROTHERS

May I suggest that the chalifot semalot, the changes of clothing in the biblical story, are an important symbol. Clothing is something you choose for yourself, but which remains external to the self. It is a way of appearing, not a way of being. Clothing, as the Torah intended the symbol and as the Rabbis interpreted it, stands for an idea of the most profound significance to all generations of Jews, ours perhaps more than any others. For the chalifot semalot are a symbol of Judaism's relation to the host culture, to the prevailing civilization of the day. To wear the clothing of a particular country means to adopt its ways, to take on the mannerism of that culture - its language, science, ~~manner~~ manners, cultural peculiarities, and outward manifestations.

When Joseph sent along the semalot to his brother, he in effect told them: you must now leave your pastoral Canaan, for you are coming to Egypt - a highly civilized country and a most sophisticated culture. Do not act like immigrants, like backward aliens. Remember that as the brothers of Joseph to have a certain status and an image which you must live up to. Away with the flowing desert robes and the shepherd staff; you must now dress in Egyptian clothing: learn the Egyptian art^s and science^s, and rise in Egyptian government service. In a word: begin to act like Egyptians!

No wonder that he sent his father a number of gifts - *At the end of the day* - but did not include any chalifot semalot, amongst them. He knew that he could never demand of his father that he Egyptianized. ^{Jacob} Abraham was already an old man, set in his ways. Certainly he would refuse to change his style of life, his appearance, and his cherished habits. But not so the brothers - they were told to change from the ways of ^{Canaan} ~~Canaan~~ to the ways of Egypt; to don the raiment of Egypt.

So that what Joseph taught his brothers and all succeeding generations of Jews, is, that everytime we Jews enter a new society - and during our long and bitter exile we had come in and out of new societies constantly - we need not fear to

JOSEPH'S GIFTS TO HIS BROTHERS

require new external ways. It is true that there will always be Jacob, who will refuse to ^aadopt. That is their privilege; but while we must not object to their refusal to acculturate, they ought not to object to our change of semalot, to the appearance of modernity that every generation takes for itself.

But - most significantly - Joseph was equally insistent, nay, more so, that we must be extremely careful and circumspect not to ^edilude ourselves into thinking ~~my~~ that adopting new externals must lead to ^aadopting our inner|selves, our ideology and religion, to that of the host culture! The acculturation must always be, like clothing, external to our real, inner|selves.

So that when Jews want to know how far they are to go in ^{adjusting} ~~adopting~~ themselves to the temper of the times, the answer is: clothing, externals, manners, language, techniques - yes. But ethics, religion, morality, observances, the Jewish heart and mind and ^usoul, the Jewish self - no!

When Jews mistake the semalot for the inner self, for the true Jewish identity; when they think that because it is all right to trade in the shtreimel and ^ebekishe for a panama hat and business suit, that therefore it is proper to trade in the tallit and ^htefillin for the hunting outfit, and shabbat and Yom Tov for ~~Halloween~~ and the tinsel ^{tr}clapping of the Christian year-~~and~~ gaiety, then it is no longer a matter of semalot; then the inner|self has become corrupted, the Jewish soul ^lcrippled and the link between us and Joseph, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham - even G-d himself - severed!

This is what the Rabbis meant when they referred ~~to~~ the five chalifot semalot of Benjamin to the five royal robes later worn by ^{his descendant} ~~the~~ Mordecai. It is the corrective to the misconception that a change of appearance must lead to a change of being. It is true that Mordecai rose in Persian ranks. He became a high officer of the government, a Persian amongst Persians, wearing all the royal garments;

-4-

JOSEPH'S GIFTS TO HIS BROTHERS

blue and white, great golden crown, robes of fine linen and purple. He was even a great civil servant and superb administrator: וְהָיָה יוֹסֵף לְאֵלֹהִים בְּמִצְרָיִם

for all the city of Shushan was happy with him. But not for a moment did Mordecai forget that he was thoroughly and irrevocably Jewish: for in the very next verse we read: וְהָיָה מֵחֵן מֶלֶךְ פֶּרְסִי וְהָיָה מֵחֵן מֶלֶךְ פֶּרְסִי

Mordecai won fame amongst the Persians, but he did not forget his fellow Jews, for as a result of his endeavors the Jews enjoyed happiness, joy, and honor! Indeed, the Bible is rather explicit: וְהָיָה מֵחֵן מֶלֶךְ פֶּרְסִי וְהָיָה מֵחֵן מֶלֶךְ פֶּרְסִי
Mordecai was second only to ~~King~~ Ahasuerus, but he remained "Mordecai the Jew." And he was not only a great Persian, but also "and great amongst the Jews." Mordecai understood that in a society which produced a Haman, he could adjust ^{to it} only ^{in his} to ^{manners} the external ^{his} not ^{to his} to its inner self life.

So it has been throughout the ages. Authentic Jews have grown to high positions in society, they have contributed mightily to the advancement of ^{the} civilizations in which they found themselves. But their adaptation was only on the order of chalifot semalot, a change of clothing. They never cease ^{to} remain, body and soul, completely Jewish.

We Orthodox Jews have always had in our midst Jacob^s - those who refuse to conform even to ^{the} outward ^emanifestations of modernity. Our Orthodox community has ^s such individuals amongst it today as well. Most of us, however, follow in the tradition of Joseph and Benjamin and Mordecai. But all of us, with ^{out} exception, are in all matters relating to the soul, the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is only in the external_s that we differ and may diverge. Our acculturation is as ^{outward} external as the garment. For our true identity remains the same throughout the ages. Essentially we are, through all times and climate^s, culture^s and vicissitudes, exiles ^{and} civilizations, The same chosen people of Almighty G-d.

JOSEPH'S GIFTS TO HIS BROTHERS

I know that there are Jews in our community who have opted for complete ^{assimilation} ~~exile~~, who have decided to throw in their spiritual lot with the world at large, and have traded in not only the Jewish sema lot but their very identity and selfhood. I would ask them if, considering the events of this past month and even this very week, they were really aware of what they have been doing, and whether they seriously expect and want all of us to do the same thing. For they ask of us to exchange ~~our~~ heritage for a world which was this week accused, albeit indirectly, ^{in the greatest crime in the annals of man} of a criminal silence? ^{of complicity} ~~A~~ ^{through} Re-read the short but dramatic sentences which Judge Landau ^{enunciated} ~~announced~~ in the preface to his historic sentencing of Eichmann. The entire world has been accused, although only one man was sentenced. Our ^{whole civilization} ~~entire world~~ was silent when the Nazi beast wrecked the Jewish people with its demonic fury.

Shall we submit and yield to a world divided by an iron curtain, where on one side of it Judaism is the only religion that is so brutally persecuted, and where on the other side - ^{ough} ~~the~~ conditions are far superior - ^{governments} ~~people~~ are ready to jeopardize world peace and even survival for the sake of the citizens of Berlin and West Germany? - Where we are even seriously considering the possibility of giving Germany control of the H-bomb? - Where the United States Government reacts angrily to the charge ~~of~~ that the Chief of ^{NATO} ~~Nato~~ ought not to be a former Nazi general? - Where the United States Army in Europe gives its highest civilian decoration to ~~former Colonel General Franz Halder~~, the man who was Hitler's Army Chief of Staff?

These, my friends, are a reflection of the rot and the corruption that has eaten its way into the very fabric of our society. We must learn from Mordecai who, aware of his contemporary Hamans, realized that even high royal position ~~is~~ only a matter of sema lot. So in a world and culture and civilization of the kind we live in, it is more than enough to adopt its externals. To imitate it internally - never! Given this kind of world, Jews ought to agree to be in it, never of it.

JOSEPH'S GIFTS TO HIS BROTHERS

I grant that it is ineffective and futile to argue with assimilationists on the basis of the biblical text or rabbinical interpretation. Assimilationists generally do not attend the synagogue and hear a Rabbi's sermon. I would recommend, therefore, that those of us who have friends who bear such tendencies, bring to the attention of these friends the words not of some Rabbi or religious leader, but the words of a prince of the Catholic church! For in an address this week, Richard Cardinal Cushing, Archbishop of Boston, told a Jewish group that the complete Americanization of the Jew in this country posed the threat that "the vast accumulation of Jewish learning and culture will now be dissipated into the wider community and in the process lose much of its strength in the generations that lie before us." Whatever might be said against the European ghettos of the past, at least one need not have been anxious in those centuries about the survival of Jewish tradition and culture. Today, unfortunately Jews are going too far in the direction of assimilation - and all the world will be the poorer. ⁴ Had the Cardinal studied the Talmud, he possibly would have used ^{the simile} ~~assimily~~ of chalifot semalot!

For indeed we Jews have been

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we have appeared differently in different epochs. We have changed our clothing from age to age; from the Nomad cape to the Arab turban, from the Russian kaftan to the Polish shtetl^rmel, from the German jack^{et} to the American business suit. In this respect we have indeed changed - the chalifot semalot - but never have we ^{allowed} ~~aroused~~ the corruption of the outside world to touch the Jewish heart and soul and mind, Jewish ideals and aims, ^{goals} ~~goals~~ and loyalties. We **have** never changed our tallit and tefillin, our Sabbath and Holy Days, our study of Torah and charity, our family purity and Kashrut.

JOSEPH'S GIFTS TO HIS BROTHERS

No wonder that before putting on the tallit every morning we recite a special prayer in which we ask of God

יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

"By virtue of the Mitzvot^{ah} of the Tzitzit, may my soul and spirit^{be saved} from the chitzonim" - meaning, the external, that which is without. May we never allow our inner self to change^{so f} ~~as~~ easily as we change our outer clothing. May we never mistake the outward ~~of~~ for the inward, the external for the internal, Americanization for de-Judaization, modernity for her^{ty}, stylishness for betrayal. If the chitzonim become peimimⁿ; ifⁱⁿ adopting outer forms we assimilate and exchange and abandon our Mitzvot and hence our inner[—]selves[—], then we have abdicat^aed our greatness and purpose, and betray^{ed} our very destiny.

If, however, we confine the ever changing ways of the world and the flux of culture and civilization only to the external, if the mitzvot^u tzitzit saves us from the encroachment of ~~the~~ chitzonim upon our inner Jewish identity - then we can yet rise to undreamed of heights as Jews, in Jewish ways, not merely as individuals who happen to be of Jewish descent.

It is told of the sainted Rav Kook, that when he was ~~on~~ his death bed he was attended by the very famous physician Dr. Sondek, who^{se} fame in medicine was equalled by his distance from the Jewish religion. Just before Rav Kook expired with the words of the Shema on his lips, Dr. Sondek bent over him and Rav Kook whispered to him the following: "^{Doctor,} I still hope to see the day when Jews who are great will also be great Jews!"

If we ~~change~~ our very being, then at most we can have some Jews who will be great. But if, as Joseph taught his brothers with his gifts, and as Mordecai ~~proved~~ in real life, we change only^{the} external aspects of life, and remain full and complete Torah Jews despite the flux of time and changing conditions - why, then, we shall be - great Jews!