

PEREK VI

and Yom Kippur (Jonah: *יחזקאל*)

(given at home of R. Joseph Karasick - 5/69)

Perek records the story of Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma who was accosted by a stranger who asked him: *אנא רבין יוסי, דא* Rabbi Yosi replied etc., etc.

What we have before us in assertion by Rabbi Yosi that it is better to live amongst sages than amongst ignoramuses, amongst wise men than amongst fools. Rabbi Yosi disdains all material awards which might entice him to a spiritually and scholarly less favorable environment. This is, apparently, an unexceptionable teaching.

Yet, the matter is not quite that simple. Is it really the best policy to pursue in order to assure the dominance of Torah in Israel? If all committed Jews decided to live exclusively in Jewish areas, where kashrut and Torah and tefillah were all assured at the highest level, would this not result in the decimation of our community and in the loss of countless thousands of Jews in the outlying communities?

Furthermore, do we not have sufficient examples of great Jews who, by risking an alien environment, succeeded in converting that milieu into great centers of Torah? For instance, we know that Rav left Palestine to go down to Babylon, and that almost singlehandedly made that community into

center of Torah for hundreds and hundreds of years to follow. Does then Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma mean to imply that this was wrong? Does he have any alternative solution for the spreading of Torah in Israel?

I believe that Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma was not preaching a kind of contemporary retrenchment policy, whereby all Orthodox Jews withdraw into one neighborhood and abandon the rest of the community. The stranger who accosted him did not ask, "Where do you live?" He asked him: *מה המקום שלך*, "From what place are you?" And therein lies the difference.

Phil^o maintained that the pious man is a stranger on earth, for he is intrinsically a citizen of Heaven, who is temporarily here. His real "place" is in Heaven.

That is, I believe, the meaning of this dialogue between the Tanna and the stranger. What, asked the stranger, is your real makom, place? What the ultimate roots of your personality? What is your true identity? I know where you live, I know what you do -- but who are you really? Rabbi Yosi's answer was simple: I come from a city of scribes and scholars. This is my makom, this is my identity. This describes the root, the source, and the character of my personality. This is my destiny and this is the nature of my aspirations.

But the stranger was not satisfied. Why do you not change your makom? What a strange identity to boast of! Come with me, join me in my goals, my destiny, my form of identity -- abandon your scholarship and your saintliness and enter into the real world, and your reward will be untold riches. Change your makom for my makom.

This would not have been too difficult. Rabbi Yosi would not even have had to move into another neighborhood. For a man's spiritual makom does not necessarily have to be identical with his geographic makom. There are people who spend their days and even nights in the Yeshiva and in the Synagogue and in the Beis Hamidrash -- but their makom, the center of their concern, their ultimate value system, is in the market-place, in Wall Street, in real estate. And there are people who spend their days making money, playing the market, buying and selling -- but the ultimate provenance of their identity of their spirit, their true and authentic makom -- is in the Yeshiva or the Synagogue or the Bais Hamidrash.

So all of us have to face that question:

And the only acceptable answer is: *הכל נמצא בלבי*
כל מה שאני עושה
הוא בשביל ה' ובעדיו

Rev. Jacob Karasick was a man who was a pioneer in settling the West Coast and introducing the spirit of Torah Judaism into it. He lived in a place that was empty of

any of the values we cherish. But his true makom was in Europe, in the Yeshivot, in the Batei Midrash, in the ohel shel Torah. And his major contribution was in introducing his makom into his residence.

It is appropriate, therefore, to express our condolences to Rabbi Karasick in the traditional formula:

יְיָ שֶׁלֵּם לְרוּחְ אֲבִיךָ

May God, in His Kindness, perpetuate the makom, the spiritual identity of your late father, אב"ד, in the life of yourself and your children. And that, we all know, will be your greatest נחמה.