

*The Dangers of Complacency*

*Parshat Vayeshev, 5781*

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*Yaakov* (Jacob) has already had a tough life. His jealousy of his brother, *Esav*, has led him to steal *Esav's* (Esau's) blessing. Fearing *Esav's* wrath, he has been forced into exile, taking refuge with his uncle *Lavan* (Laban), a scoundrel, who repeatedly attempts to cheat him. His daughter, Dinah, has been raped, and he has lost his beloved Rachel in childbirth.

But now *Yaakov* has arrived in the "Promised Land." The *Parsha* opens, "And Jacob settled in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan."

Unlike his father and grandfather, *Yaakov* is not a "wandering Jew" (Jew is a later term but the expression is apropos). He has settled in the land in which his forebears had been only able to sojourn. It appears that *Yaakov* has arrived home; he is settled in his land and is preparing for a happy ending.

However, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 106a), cautions us that whenever we hear that someone has "settled," trouble will ensue. Immediately after settling, *Yosef* (Joseph) begins bringing negative reports to his father, *Yaakov*, about his brothers. The sibling rivalry escalates as the brothers sell *Yosef* into slavery, depriving *Yaakov* of his favored son for years. Towards the end of his life, *Yaakov* is forced into exile again, this time in *Mitzrayim* (Egypt).

The Talmud is warning us that being "settled" can lead to complacency. Fortunately, the Maccabees understood this danger and were thus able to save Judaism. They could have reasoned that the Hellenists were only proscribing rituals, such as *Shabbat*, *Kashrut* & *Brit Milah* (circumcision), which Jewish law does not require us to risk our lives to observe. You can almost hear the argument being made: "Since the Hellenists are closing down the *Kosher* restaurants, we'll go to the Greek diner for dinner instead." However, the Maccabees realized that, without the observance of such rituals of identification, Jewish identity would be lost and Judaism would be swept away by the rising tide of Hellenism. What was at stake was the transcendence of the Jewish soul.

The *Mishna Berura* reasons that we recite *Hallel* on Chanukah but are not required to partake in *Seudat Mitzvah* (festive meal) because our souls not bodies were threatened; therefore, we celebrate not with our bodies by eating but with our souls by praising God.

Conversely, on Purim we partake in a *Seudat Mitzvah* but do not recite *Hallel* because, unlike Chanukah, Jews were threatened not with spiritual annihilation (Haman did not proscribe Jewish ritual) but with physical annihilation. Therefore we celebrate with our bodies in the form of a celebratory meal.

We at AKSE should be proud that we have not been complacent. There was understandably much anxiety about our transition from our old home, and we have also had to contend with COVID-19. Yet, as we celebrate Chanukah, which celebrates the *Chanukat Habayit* (the rededication of the Temple), we also prepare to celebrate our own *Chanukat*

*Habayit* and dedicate **our** new sanctuary (home). The soul of AKSE has shown that it is transcendent and is ready to enter its new body—its new home. We are doubly blessed this year. After celebrating Chanukah, we will get to celebrate the dedication of our shul's new home. We are planning a *Chanukat Habayit* for the near future, as we place a *Mezuzah* on the front doorpost of our new home. Stay tuned for details.

Welcome Home & Shabbat Shalom