

VAYISHLACH: FOUR FACES OF EISAV

- Nisson Shulman.

Jacob and Esau in confrontation, then and now. Four faces of the enemy, a shepherd, a robber, a scholar, as a king. What does this mean in terms of today's anti-Semitism? Four symbolic figures, representing archetypal enemies of the Jewish people.

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We read the climax of the story of Jacob and Esav, the dramatic confrontation of the brothers. It is not simply a confrontation of foes - a civil war that reaches its final stage. There is a mystical, mysterious element in this struggle.

Rambam and Ramban discuss whether this struggle actually took place, or it was a vision that Jacob saw as a prophet. But both agree - as do all our sages - that in this story is the history of our people all through the ages till today, in their confrontation with the nations of the world. At the end of this struggle there is victory and blessing.

The sages of the Midrash, in an attempt to clarify the elements of this confrontation, teach that the angel of Esav appeared with four faces. Throughout the night Jacob struggled with an angel who appear now like a shepherd, now like a robber, now like a scholar, now like a king over a mighty nation.

What does this mean? What did our Rabbis see that caused them to describe the Jewish enemies like a shepherd, a robber, a scholar and a king? Apparently our sages saw in Esav's spirit four types of anti-Semite; four enemies, represented by these four symbolic figures.

Nowadays we hear various interpretations of anti-Semitism, whether here, whether from Arab lands, whether in Europe. There are many who say that it has grown dangerously, more seriously than ever since the end of the World War. We used to hear voices on the Jewish scene, saying that it is different than anti-Semitism of 50, 60 years ago and will pass away by itself. We heard it described as an expression of nationalism; or as a manifestation of hard economic times; or as a reaction to excessive immigration of foreigners. We don't hear many such voices now. Most of our thinking Jews clearly see the growth and menace of today's Jew-hatred. Many are worried about the leaders, the neo-Nazi rabble-rousers. Are they cranks who will run their course and then disappear, or are they the dangerous catalysts of a poisonous social movement? And some are concerned that American self-interest will cause our country to slide towards favoring our enemies. Above all, everyone is concerned about Arab political and religious hate. It has overflowed beyond the issue of Israel versus the Palestinians and includes some of the most vicious attacks and libels that Jew-haters have invented through our long and difficult history.

The sages saw four faces in the Angel representing Esav's spirit; each a different expression of anti-Semitism.

1. They saw him as a Shepherd: The Shepherd is the symbol of the leader of a faith. Many times they came to destroy us in the name of faith. There are three ways the shepherd attacks; He appears like a G-d, like the tyrant Antiochus who imagined he was a G-d. Such a tyrant tries to suppress our faith and demands we worship him instead.

The shepherd is also a crusader in the name of his faith. The first mass murderers of European history were the crusaders. In 1096 G-dfrey of Boullion vowed that the blood of his G-d would be avenged with the blood of the Jews. He and his men totally destroyed the communities of Spiers, Worms, Mayence, Rameru, Blois and hundreds of others, with their sages, their works, their students; men women and children, in a bloody sweep from England through France, Germany, Lithuania, Galicia, the Baltic countries, and the Holy Land. The Spanish Inquisition of 1492 also came in the name of faith, and the leaders of the murders were the shepherds of that faith. So he appears like a Crusader, and one of his weapons is the blood libel, which started the massacre in York. Today some Moslem groups and clerics insist that as an element of their faith no other flag may ever fly where the crescent once flew, and so it is a fundamental element of their faith that the State of Israel be destroyed.

The Shepherd is also a missionary. He wears the cloak, cap and collar of the theologian. The Pope will still only recognize Israel de facto but not de jure, for theological reasons; that we must wander to give credence to the theory that we suffer yet for the crucifixion of their G-d.

So this is the first face of the anti-Semite, the shepherd.

2. The spirit of Esav has another form and face. He is the robber. In the year 867, King Egica of Spain declared all Jews were slaves in perpetuity, so that their goods could be confiscated. The temptation to seize Jewish wealth has been an overpowering motive of our enemies from the time Elipaz, Esav's son, overtook the fleeing Jacob and stripped him of everything, leaving him destitute with nothing but his clothes and a wooden staff.

During most of the Middle Ages, France's treasury had a special department labelled, "Jewish Revenue". Overlords bartered Jews, trading them like possessions. Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel, the Ra"sh, stated: "The only reason the governments and the overlords tolerate our presence and let us live amongst them, is because of the revenue we bring and the benefits we bring them".

In February 1255, for instance, King Henry III sold all England's Jews to his brother Richard for one year, for the sum of 5,000 marks. And during the Black Death, in 1348, when Jews were blamed and accused by Gentiles of poisoning their wells, a contemporary non-Jewish historian confessed that the poison which killed the Jews was their wealth! So the angel of Esav appears like a robber as well.

3. And a scholar: Universities in Europe, here, as in America, hide bigots who conceal their anti-Semitism behind a cloak of Academic language, and who try, in university classes, to incite the students to hate the Jews. The recent and present scandal on the Columbia University campus is only one of many such, and illustrates the extent of the problem. The very youth of Neo-Nazis shows that their teachers have been successful in conveying their message of hate. One of the

most respected Ivy League Universities in America gathered a selected group of senior professors and administrators to discuss the World Trade Center terrorism. They began to discuss the reasons it happened, saying that if not for the Jewish occupation of Palestine it would never have taken place. One of the most revered law professors, renowned for his defense of freedom of speech, spoke up to say that the hate and the attack did not come because of the Jews, and he was immediately silenced by the group, who with one voice declared that he had no right to voice an opinion in that discussion because he is Jewish, therefore prejudiced, not loyal to the United States but rather to his own group, the Jews, and should be disregarded in that discussion. He was so shocked that he called a colleague to tell him that never had he been spoken to with such disregard and disrespect in academic circles.

We have seen this type of behavior before. You may remember Toynbee's statements, spoken with all the sonorous authority of Academia, that Jews in 1948 were guilty of the same kind of crimes as were the Nazis. That was the first intimation that the nations of the world would - in the United Nations - come to brand Zionism as Racism. Toynbee further maintained that Judaism is a fossil, a freak of history; and that the Jewish people have no historic right to existence, let alone to Israel. Toynbee was in the spirit and tradition of all who come in the name of learning and science, but whose real aim is the destruction of the people of Israel, or at least the removal of the people from the Land of Israel. This is the form of Esav's spirit who appears like a sage or scholar, and you can find him in every department of every University, not only in Europe and England, but even here, in free America as well.

4. And finally, Esav appears as a ruler representing his nation. Obviously, this is the form taken by our foes around the propaganda cum debating cum bargaining tables of the UN, of the bargaining tables, and of describes what we might expect again from most of them, were peace negotiations with Arabs ever to resume. This was the scurrilous attack against Israel whose chorus was heard everywhere in Durban at the World Conference on Racism. We remember well the statement by President Chaim Herzog, of blessed memory, when he sat in the United Nations, declaring, "They are anti-Jewish, anti-Semitic, anti-Israel, discriminatory, and racist." And he added, "Nowhere does one have that feeling of a people dwelling alone, than at the United Nations".

So these are the four forms of the spirit of Esav, the Shepherd, the Robber, the Scholar, and the ruler representing his Nation.

Our Rabbis showed them all to us in order to put us on our guard, so that we should not think that a different appearance makes Esav less of an anti-Semite. The excuse may be theology, economy, immigration, nationalism - but whatever the appearance, it is still the spirit of Esav, no less an anti-Semite than when he came with the sword of crusader or the gas pellets of the gas chamber.

Be on guard! "Hine lo yanum velo yishan, Shomer Yisrael"; "The ever watchful guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps". We are required to imitate G-d Himself! Just as He never sleeps, so must we not be caught asleep!

Jacob triumphs over all of them. G-d promises that in the long reach of history, these Esav angels

will not prevail. It will be a hard struggle through this night, but we must keep hope and faith just as Jacob kept hope and faith. And in the end, the blessing will come, and we shall earn the name of Israel, who struggled with peoples, with the spirit that moves them, and prevailed.