

CHIZUK *and* IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

by **Rabbi Yerachmiel Roness**
Ramat Shiloh, Beit Shemesh

B'shalach '16

The Biblical narrative is often terse. We are provided with a general and broad description of the events while many of the intriguing details are left out. In this week's parsha, the Targum (an Aramaic translation of the Torah composed in early Talmudic times) fills us in with the particulars of one unusually interesting back-story, which the text of the Torah only alludes to briefly.

The first verse of this week's parsha tells us that the Almighty did not lead the Jewish People out of Egypt by way of the land of the P'lishtim lest they regret when they see war and return to Egypt. This cryptic explanation is fleshed out by the Targum where we are told that the war referred to in the verse, is not a potential war which could be waged in the future, but rather an allusion to a war which predated the Exodus by some thirty years: "When warriors of the tribe of Efrayim (Bnei Efrayim) with shields, spears and weapons of war, went down to Gath to plunder the herds of the P'lishtim. Since they

went out of Egypt thirty years too soon, by dint of having miscalculated the end of the exile, and thereby transgressing the Divine decree, they were all killed in battle." [The miscalculation resulted from their having counted the four hundred years of the exile beginning from the time of the "Brit Bein Habetarim" rather than from the birth of Yitzchak]. Rashi, too, makes reference to this earlier debacle, in his commentary on Shirat HaYam, commenting on the source of the fear mentioned in the phrase "trembling took hold of the inhabitants of Peleshet" (Sh'mot 15:14). Rashi writes that the inhabitants of Peleshet remembered having killed B'nei Efrayim when they had tried to hasten the end of the exile, and now feared retribution.

What lesson are we to learn from this episode in which tens of thousands died as a result of their miscalculation? A possible conclusion is that in order not to repeat their mistake it is best to sit back and wait. In fact the late Satmar Rebbe, who passionately advocated our responsibility of waiting passively for the Mashiach to come, pointed to the episode of Bnei Efrayim as a cautionary tale, from which we must learn of the tragic consequences of acting against the prohibition of SHELO YAALU BACHOMA, "breaching the wall", or

"forcing the end". The requirement that we refrain from any sort of active rebellion against our Galut status, steering far away from any political steps calculated to hasten, and to force, the arrival of the final redemption. (VaYoel Moshe, Ma'amar Shalosh Shavuot, 24 and 26).

Yet, the Midrash on our verse draws a stark image: "the Almighty dipped His sword, as it were, into the blood of the tribe of Efrayim... and said: I shall not be consoled until I shall avenge the sons of Efrayim", Sh'mot Rabba 20. The Midrash interprets the verb NACHAM as if it is derived from the (root) shoresh of NECHAMA - consolation. According to the Midrash, V'LO NACHAM ELOKIM, usually translated as G-d did not lead them, is to be understood as saying that G-d would not be consoled until the blood of Bnei Efrayim was avenged. This means that despite Efrayim's erroneous calculation, and their hasty departure, G-d did not look upon them with disdain. They were seen as martyrs whose death G-d swore to avenge.

The Yalkut Shimoni expresses this same understanding utilizing the following parable: V'LO NACHAM - G-d would not be consoled - "This is likened to a king who was to marry off his son when suddenly during the

chupa another one of his sons dies. The king said: "It is impossible to be happy because I lost a son, yet, it is impossible to mourn because I am marrying off a son." On the one hand he danced but on the other he eulogized. Therefore, it says LO NACHAM He was not consoled". (Yalkut Shimoni, B'shalach, Remez 225). Bnei Efrayim are wholeheartedly mourned, in the same manner one would grieve over a beloved son who died of no wrongdoing.

Whether or not the Satmarer's claim had merit in the earlier stages of the Zionist enterprise, today the argument is moot. The original tens of thousands of "Bnei Efrayim" of our own time, who felt the time of the redemption had come and hastily set out to bring about the change, have been followed by millions more. We are currently witness the continuing homecoming of Jews to our homeland. Nevertheless, we still impatiently await the homecoming of more and more.

To those who have chosen to remain afar, I suggest the following: As you bless your child this Friday night praying that G-d allow him to "be like Efrayim and Menashe" ask yourself - is it not time that I, too, emulate Efrayim and leave Galut?