

A Taste of Torah

Fearsome Foursome

by Rabbi Yaakov Zions

We recently marked the fifteenth anniversary of 9/11, and our world, in many ways, has been permanently altered. Our complacency in our daily activities is all-too-often sprinkled with uncertainty, and that's without considering the situation on the ground in ISIS-controlled territories. What is the secret of the powers of these third-world troops instilling fear in the minds and hearts of peaceful people around the globe? Many believe it is their sheer determination in their mission, perverted as it may be. Although there is certainly truth to this, let us explore another possibility.

In this week's parsha, we are told of the vision of the *Bris Bain Habesarim* (Covenant of Between the Parts), where our forefather Avraham is shown the destiny of his progeny. This story follows the story of Avraham's rescue of his nephew Lot from captivity at the hands of the powerful four allied kings. The Medrash (Bereishis Rabba 42:2 and 44:17) comments that both of these incidents allude to the "Four Kingdoms." In Daniel's visions (Daniel Ch. 2, 7), he describes four great world powers who would shape world history. Although the fourth kingdom is not mentioned by name, the Sages identify it as the descendants of Eisav, the nation of Edom, manifested in Rome (which descends from Eisav's son Magdi'el). According to many sources, including Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270), Rome later metamorphoses into the Christian "empire."

The aforementioned Medrash

comments, "Just as the beginning (of our history) begins with four kingdoms, so, too, will it end with the four kingdoms."

The *Bris Bein Habesarim* also represents the four kingdoms, and can be understood as the second bookend to the story of the four allied kings. Avraham was being shown the grand scheme of world history; recurring exiles and redemptions and how they lead Creation toward its ultimate destiny.

In addition to the explicit discussion of the Four Kingdoms in the book of Daniel and the allusions in our parsha, there are many additional references to these kingdoms throughout Tanach (the 24 holy books of Scripture). The Abarbanel (Rabbi Yitzchak Abarbanel, 1437-1508), in his masterpiece commentary on the book of Daniel, *Mayanei Hayeshua* (2:1), quotes more than ten of these references.

The Rishonim (medieval commentators) grapple with a perplexing question: Why is Yishmael not considered one of the world kingdoms? Are his descendants, the Arabs, not major players on the world scene? The Ramban (Sefer Hage'ula, page 283, Chavel edition) answers that the kingdoms mentioned each rose to power on the heels of the previous one. Yishmael, however, did not displace the previous world empire, Edom, and is therefore omitted. The Maharal (Rabbi Yehuda Loewe of Prague, 1520-1609), in his work *Ner Mitzva*, answers that only the kingdoms who have usurped the Jewish Nation's place of honor and

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Because Torah Is for Every Jew

Stories For The Soul

Walk the Walk

Reb Yaakov Yosef Herman (1880-1967) immigrated to Palestine with his wife, Aidel, in 1939. The couple settled in Jerusalem, and Reb Yaakov Yosef resolved that he would not sleep outside the holy city.

Mr. Herman once visited Tel Aviv, about 45 miles from Jerusalem. By the time he was ready to leave, the last bus back to Jerusalem had already departed. No long-distance taxis were available, either.

Reb Yaakov Yosef began the trip back to Jerusalem - on foot. As he walked along the road in the dark, a car sped by, then screeched to a halt. The driver climbed out, approached Mr. Herman, and exclaimed, "Rebbe, is it really you?!" It was one of the young men whom he taught in Jerusalem. The fellow offered his teacher a ride, and the two got back in the car.

Reb Yaakov Yosef explained to his stunned student why he was walking alongside the road in middle of the night. "Rebbe," said the driver, "even if you'd walk all night, you wouldn't arrive back in Jerusalem!"

"If you want to do a mitzvah," replied Reb Yaakov Yosef, "you have to jump in and start. Hashem will take care of the rest. And look - He did!"

Our forefather Avraham was told by Hashem to leave everything behind and go to the land to which He would lead him. Avraham had nothing but Hashem's promise to take care of him - but depart he did, despite the great challenges he faced.

Kollel Happenings

THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION GOLD LUNCH & LEARN PROGRAM

The M.B. Glassman Foundation GOLD Program is a division of the Denver Community Kollel dedicated to bringing Torah study to seniors in the community. Don't miss a great Lunch and Learn class on the weekly parsha at the East Side Kosher Deli, 499 S. Elm St. at 12:00 am. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! Transportation can be arranged. For more information, contact rmf@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855

LEARN 2 LEARN

You have long dreamed of acquiring the tools to achieve proficiency in learning Gemara on your own. But how? The Denver Community Kollel offers a comprehensive, step-by-step, level-by-level program crafted for people just like you. All you need is the ability to read Hebrew; we will teach you the rest. For more information, contact rmh@denverkollel.org.

A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA WITH RABBI SHACHNE SOMMERS

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issue, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Sunday nights, 7:40-8:30 pm, at the Kollel for men, 1516 Xavier, and Tuesday nights at the Southeast Kollel Torah center, 8-9 pm, for men and women.

Increase Your Jewish IQ

By Rabbi Yaakov Zions

This week marks the 100th question of Jewish IQ!

Last week we asked: There is a custom followed by many communities (especially those that follow Nusach Ashkenaz) to add special prayers during the months of Cheshvan and Iyar. What are these prayers, why are they said, and what is their source?

A: These prayers are inserted in the *shacharis* prayers on two consecutive Mondays and the Thursday between them (referred to by their Hebrew acronym, BaHaB). They are *selichos* (prayers for forgiveness), as recited on all public fasts. These BaHaB days were originally instituted as fast days to atone

for the possibility of having sinned due to frivolity due to the lengthy holidays of the previous month (Sukkos in Tishrei and Pesach in Nissan). Although today, most communities no longer observe these fasts, the *selichos* are still recited. BaHaB is mentioned by many Rishonim (medieval Torah authorities), among them Tosafos (Kiddushin 81a) and the Tur (Orach Chaim 492) (authored by Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher, 1270-c. 1340).

This week's question: During which exact days in the months of Cheshvan and Iyar do we begin reciting the BaHaB prayers?

To submit an answer to Rabbi Zions, email ryz@denverkollel.org.

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

The Ran – Part IV

The Rivash himself had a number of prominent disciples, including Rabbi Shimon ben Tzemach Duran (1361-1444), known by the acronym the RaSHBaTZ. He succeeded the Rivash as the rabbi of Algiers, and his responsa, published under the name Tashbatz, are also oft-quoted and used by later halachic authorities.

The Rashbatz had a son, Rabbi Shlomo ben Shimon Duran (1400-1467), known by the acronym the RaSHBaSH, who was a Torah leader in his own right. Rabbi Shlomo succeeded his father as the leader of Algiers. His many responsa, as well, were published and are studied and quoted until today.

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inherited its rightful seat on the throne are included in the count. Yishmael is different from all the other kingdoms, as his power is independent, and can even technically coexist, with the Jewish Nation in its prime. One can speculate that his answer may be the deeper understanding of the Ramban's answer.

The future redemption will come about through the fall of Edom (as prophesied by Ovadia), when the Jewish People will regain their lost glory. The fall of Yishmael is independent of our redemption and can happen at any time.

The Gemara (Megilla 11a) relates that there is a special danger of a decree

enacted by a *hedyot* (regular citizen, as opposed to a king). One explanation of this is that there are normal interactions between citizens and kings or between governments, and these relationships are subject to a regular system of Divine guidance that ensures the ultimate salvation of the oppressed. If there is a coup, however, and the attackers are average citizens, a different set of Heavenly rules apply, and the risks are far greater. Is it any wonder, then, that the kingdom of Yishmael has such unorthodox successes? May we merit protection from Hashem from all our enemies!