



*“Words from the Heart
Enter the Heart”*

GENESIS > Vayeitzei

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November 21, 2015
Vayeitzei

Why France?



Meaningful Sermons *“Words from the Heart Enter the Heart”*

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ABSTRACT

Our hearts go out to the citizens of France, and to all innocent citizens of the world. We cry with those who have lost their loved ones. We, who have lost too many, weep with those whose sense of peace and tranquility has been torn apart.

Unfortunately, as Jews, we know what it's like to go to a concert or a restaurant with the fear that at any time someone who hates us may blow himself up to slaughter as many of us as possible.

Sadly, as Jews, we know what it's like to be hunted and persecuted - to have our loved ones slaughtered by terrorists shouting *Allahu Akbar!*

And, certainly, as Jews, we know how God must weep uncontrollably at the sight of murder being committed in His name, by those calling Him “great.”

Now - that it's clear as day that the terror threatens us all - we must join together and commit to eliminating these foreboding forces.

And we Jews, who have borne the brunt of this terror throughout history, have to lead the way, demonstrating to the French and to the entire world how to fight this war.

As we mourn the tragic murders of French citizens, we find *Tzarfat* (France in Hebrew) hinted at in our Torah reading of this week. And, within the blessing that God gives Jacob as he dreams of ladders – specifically in the blessing to spread out, *u'faratzta* – we discover how to destroy all evil and terror and build in its place true Godly greatness.

France carries the secret to solving our problems today.

The words in this chapter are as relevant today as ever: *Through you and through your descendants shall be blessed all the families of the earth. And behold! I am with you, and I will guard you wherever you go.*

WHY FRANCE?

1. At One with France

Our hearts go out to the citizens of France. We cry with those who have lost their loved ones. We, who have lost too many, weep with those whose sense of peace and tranquility has been torn apart.

Unfortunately, as Jews, we know what it's like to go to a concert or a restaurant with the fear that at any time someone who hates us may blow himself up to slaughter as many of us as possible.

Sadly, as Jews, we know what it's like to be hunted and persecuted – to have our loved ones slaughtered by terrorists shouting *Allahu Akbar!*

And certainly, as Jews, we know how God must weep uncontrollably at the sight of murder being committed in His name, by those calling Him “great.”

But as Jews we also know – and we must teach the world – how to face this challenge.

Now – that it's clear as day that the terror threatens us all – we must join together and commit to eliminating these foreboding forces.

And we Jews, who have borne the brunt of this terror throughout history, have to lead the way, demonstrating to the French and to the entire world how to fight this war.

2. Metaphor: A Burning House

In order to discuss just how we can do that, let me offer the following metaphor:

Say France – or Israel, or anywhere or anyone being attacked by Islamic terrorists – was a burning house, with destructive flames licking at its walls, floors and foundations, what would we do to save such a burning house?

What would a healthy, normal, conscious human being do upon seeing a house on fire?

We'd call 911 of course, and report the blaze. The professional firefighters would show up sirens blaring, and they would fight the fire with everything they've got, using every weapon at their disposal. The firefighters would contain the spreading flames, and they would make sure to put out the fire at the source.

When a house is burning, the immediate and number one priority in putting out the fire is ensuring that it doesn't spread, and that the people in the vicinity are protected.

This is so obvious, but often times in this convoluted universe, the obvious must be stated and overstated: Islamic terrorism is a fire that is burning our buildings and snuffing out lives. We must mobilize our firefighters and snuff out this fire with every tool at our disposal.

This doesn't mean just dousing the flames which have spread from the Middle East to France. This means putting out the fire at the source – where ISIS, Hamas, Hezbollah and Al Qaeda dwell.

3. How to Fight a Fire

How do you fight any fire?

With well-equipped and highly-trained firefighters.

The life-eating fire that is Islamic terrorism must be fought by highly trained firefighters as well – by military and intelligence professionals, by anti-terror experts. This is their job, what they get paid for, and it's time for them to act. That's obvious.

But there is more to fighting fires. It is just as important to figure out the cause of the fire. If the fire constantly re-ignites, we must know why.

The need for military action and to do whatever it takes to prevent future attacks is relatively straightforward. But dealing with the root cause of the fire – any fire – is more complex and far-reaching. It means figuring out why the fire ignited in the first place – was it faulty wiring, was it a gas leak, was it an untended stove – and taking the necessary steps to prevent such a situation recurring in the future.

How to accomplish the latter is revealed in this week's Torah reading, *Parshat Vayeitzei*, which actually alludes (by way of a hint) to France.

4. Parshat Vayeitzei

This week we read about the famed episode of Jacob's ladder. Fleeing the murderous rage of his brother Esau, Jacob finds rest for the night on Mount Mariah,¹ a place that will ultimately be known as the Temple Mount.

Fascinating and foretelling, isn't it?

As Jacob lies down to sleep, he dreams. And in his dream, the Creator of the Universe blesses him:

¹ Rashi to Genesis 28:11.

“And your seed shall be as the dust of the earth and you shall spread (u’faratzta) westward and eastward and northward and southward; and through you and through your descendants shall be blessed all the families of the earth. And behold! I am with you, and I will guard you wherever you go, and I will restore you to this land, for I will not forsake you until I have done what I have spoken concerning you.”²

This is a very inspiring blessing, defining Jacob’s mission in the world. In so many words, it says: “Your purpose and the purpose of your children is to blanket the earth with light and holiness, and when you do so, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. And, in case you are concerned about your mission, know that I, God, guarantee that I will protect you.”

But note the strange word *u’faratzta* (“and you shall spread”). This doesn’t seem like a blessing at all, for would not a family patriarch desire that all his descendants be together in one neighborhood, never mind one land, rather than be spread out throughout the world? Is it not sad and frightening for a father and mother to have their children scattered?

The thing is God isn’t telling Jacob what’s easy but what’s necessary. For this is the way to bless all the families of the earth.

How it works is explained through “the French connection” hinted at in this word *u’faratzta*.

5. The French Connection

The Hebrew word for France is *Tzarfat*, composed of the four Hebrew letters *tzadik, resh, pfei, tof*.

The Hebrew word for “spread” *faratzta*, is composed of the same exact four Hebrew letters *pfei, resh, tzadik, tof*.

² Genesis 28:14-15.

Tzarfat, France, seems to equal *faratzta*, meaning “spread.”³

The fact that we read the blessing of *u'faratzta* in this week's Torah portion, on the Shabbat following the horrors that occurred in *Tzarfat* (France), is no coincidence.

We Jews do not have the luxury of coincidence. If France is alluded to in this week's portion, then this is more than serendipitous, it is providential, and, surely this allusion contains the illuminated answer to the darkness that has visited the world.

The root word of both *ufaratzta* and *Tzarfat* is *tzadik-resh-pfei*, which is also the root of *tzaraf* or *tziruf*, which means “refined/purified.”⁴

So thus we can infer that the inner meaning and ultimate goal of *u'faratzta* is so that we may refine and purify the world, pre-empting any wild fires that burn houses and people with a warm and illuminating flame that elevates the world.

6. The Map of the World

If you look at a map of the world – that is, Planet Earth – you will see a tiny speck right smack in the middle. That tiny speck is the Land of Israel, and in its center is located Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, where Jacob dreamed and was blessed with *u'faratzta*.

The Torah states that God gave this tiny land to the descendants of Jacob (later re-named Israel) hence the name Land of Israel. From this spot the Children of Israel would spread out east, west, north and south, in accordance with God's blessing, and then, ultimately, they will be gathered from the four corners of the earth back to the Holy Land of Israel, in accordance with God's promise.

⁴ I.e. Daniel 12:10.

³ See Sefer Hasichot 5752 vol. I, pp. 174 at length.

The Torah also teaches that God gave the lands east of Israel to the children of (Abraham's other son) Ishmael, and the lands west of Israel to the children of (Isaac's other son) Esau. If you look at that same world map, east of Israel is the rest of the Middle East, beginning with modern-day Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, passing Iraq, Iran and heading out to the Far East of India and China. If you look at the world map west of Israel, to the south-west is Egypt, Libya, Morocco, while to the north-west is Turkey, Ukraine, Romania, Austria, Germany, Italy, France and reaching across the Atlantic Ocean, North and South America.

It does not take a genius to see that the world is split between East and West (we call it eastern thinking and western thinking for a reason, and there are eastern religions and western religions for a reason), and it takes even less of a genius to recognize that Israel is situated smack in the middle. It is the bridge between these two worlds, the nucleus of this cosmic organism, the heart and soul of the world body, connecting the right side of the body (east) to the left (west).

Nor does one need to be a genius to understand that the tensions between the East and West – between the children of Ishmael and the children of Esau, between the Islamic countries and the Christian ones – evolve around and pass through that little land (and little people) at its crossroads: Israel.

And, finally, one need not be a genius to arrive at this logical conclusion: the solution for the tensions between East and West, between Ishmael and Esau, between France (which embodies Western thinking about democracy and individual freedom) and Syria, Iraq, Iran, or any other Islamic country that subscribes by a different ideology.

And this resolution is conveyed in *u'faratzta*.

The dispersion (*faratzta*) of Jacob's (Israel's) children to east, west, north and south is so that the whole world could be refined and purified (*tzaraf*).

7. A Blessing or a Necessity?

One may very well think that being spread out – *u'faratzta* – is not a blessing at all, counter-intuitive to building a family and fulfilling its divine mission. But that thought is only true if you look at the world through finite and near-sighted glasses. If your long-sighted vision is for the entire earth, from east to west, north to south, to be saturated with the peace and holiness of Godliness then, in addition to *u'faratzta* being a blessing, it is also a necessity.

Here's a hypothetical alternative blessing: "May all your seed remain within your presence, never leaving the Holy Land. May you all remain under one roof and may none of you ever stray."

This, at first glance, seems like a better blessing. Why didn't God tell this blessing to Jacob as he lay there on the Temple Mount dreaming?

Additionally, from the verse immediately following *u'faratzta*, we get a hint at the ultimate goal: *and I will restore you to this land* – if ultimately God will restore the Jewish people to the Promised Land, gathering everyone from the four corners of the earth (from the east, west, north, south) why spread them out in the first place?

Why *u'faratzta*?

8. France is the Answer

The answer lies in the blessing of *Tzarfat*, France. And herein also lies the solution to the terror and threat of radical Islam.

As Jacob slept on the Temple Mount and dreamed, God blessed him not with what's easy but with his purpose here on earth. God could have blessed Jacob that all his seed and offspring would be in Israel *ad infinitum*, Jews in one neighborhood in perpetuity, never leaving, never threatened, never lost.

But God didn't bless Jacob that way. Instead, God blessed Jacob that his children should spread out all over the world and bring to the world the light of the Divine.

Israel's purpose is not to exist in a vacuum; Israel's purpose is to spread out and to bridge the east and the west.

The first time in history that Jews could actually do this is now, thanks to Western ideas and ideologies that are embodied by the West, starting with France.

The profundity of this may be best conveyed by something that occurred in 1912, in Menton, a city on the French Riviera, the Côte d'Azur in the South of France.

It was there that the Rebbe Rashab, the fifth Chabad Rebbe, began to outline his most comprehensive and analytical work, which allows the human mind to literally grasp God and God's plan for the universe in a logical manner.

This work is known as *Hemshech Ayin Beis*, or "Continuum 72," named so for the Hebrew year 5672, and it includes 144 discourses written over the course of the next six years.

This work is admittedly (and inevitably) highly complex and supremely sophisticated, requiring countless hours of study to ingest. But even if one may find it quite difficult to understand its nuances, one can still glean what the Rebbe Rashab is diagramming.

9. Rebbe Rashab's Insights

In a nutshell:

The Enlightenment of 18th century – which began as the Age of Reason in France (*Tzarfat*) – allowed Jews to leave the ghettos and spread out (*faratzta*), geographically, innovatively and academically, in order to refine and purify (*tzaraf*) the world.

Yet, this opportunity posed a great challenge as well: How does one enter a secular world and not compromise or lose their spiritual integrity? Indeed, we find that Jewish assimilation was born directly out of the emancipation of the Jews.

This precisely is the challenge of *faratzta* (*Tzarfat*) – a far more sophisticated challenge than living in an insulated world: To learn how to stay true to Judaism and make God real even in an “enlightened” world, even for a rational thinker, dedicated to reason and science.

We could never have risen to this challenge if it was not for *u'faratzta*. Had we never spread out geographically, we would never have spread out analytically – our analytical and logical prowess would have remained dormant in the walls of the *shtetl*. But now that we have spread out, we are compelled to articulate the truths of Torah in such a way that even the logical sensibilities of the West can absorb.

And these sensibilities were born in France. So, essentially, the only way to achieve true *u'faratzta* is via *Tzarfat*.

The root of radical Islam’s raging war of fire against Western “enlightenment” is its belief that the only way to battle the infidels of the West is through destruction. Jihadists want to burn down the West, because they truly believe that the West is a house that should be burned down.

So we must fight back. But beyond the obvious need for military intervention to extinguish this fire short-term, the bigger and long-term war is to uproot the core base of radical Islam’s belief. It’s not enough to simply beat them in the battlefield. We must also win the battle over faith and religion. We need to replace the faulty wiring that caused the fire – their distorted faith and religion, which argues that violence is the only way to deal with a Western modern world – with the true, genuine and eternal wiring as conveyed in God’s Torah, that we must refine and purify (*tzaraf*), not destroy, the world.

Instead of insulating and closing ourselves in, we must live up to our blessing – the very blessing Jacob received on Mount Mariah, the Temple Mount – *u'faratzat yomoh va'keidmah v'tzofoneh v'negbah*, you shall spread westward and eastward and northward and southward; and through you and through your descendants shall be blessed all the families of the earth.

We must bridge and unite east, west, north and south, so that all the families of the earth will be blessed.

First, military might is required. We must destroy and uproot ISIS, Al Qaeda, Hamas, Fatah, Boka Haram, Hezbollah, and any organization that incites hatred and advocates terrorism.

And then, we must show the world how we are the light, how all the families of the world are blessed by us.

We do so both collectively and personally, by each of us refining our corner of the world. By taking the gifts we were blessed with, including material ones, technology and our other amenities – and instead of indulging in them for selfish use, we use them toward a divine end, helping others, becoming more giving, etc.

This is the counterforce to those that believe that violence is the only solution to modernity.

10. The Beginning of Redemption (Conclusion)

Next week's *Haftorah* – written by the Prophet Obadiah, some 2,500 years ago, 500 years before the advent of Christianity and close to 1,000 years before the birth of Islam – describes the Final Redemption. And it mentions France. Indeed, this is the only explicit mention of France in the entire Bible.

*And the exiled host of the children of Israel who are among the Canaanites as far as Tzarfat (France) and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sfarad (Spain) shall inherit the cities of the south.*⁵

It's called prophecy for a reason. It foretells of what will be in the times to come, in the End of Days. In this regard, France is a reminder to us, the Children of Israel, of our purpose and our blessing.

The transformation of France – *Tzarfat* – where the Age of Reason began – is the key to redemption: Demonstrating that the free world is not antithetical to the Divine (and must therefore be killed), but it can be fused with God, in a harmonious union.

⁵ Obadiah 1:20.

Obadiah's prophecy ends with this:

And the liberators shall ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau [the Western World], and kingdom shall be the Lord's.⁶

May it be so, speedily in our days! Shabbat Shalom!

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⁶ Obadiah 1:21.