 **The Purple Sheet**

Parshat VaYakhel, February 21/22nd~22 *Adar* 5774

**North Korea - Western Hypocrisy**

Almost two years ago I wrote about atrocities committed by the North Korean government as described by a powerful book, *Escape from Camp 14.*North Korea finally resurfaced in the news this week which I will get to in a moment, but first a reminder of what I wrote back then:

*Escape From Camp 14* describes the story of one man's incarceration and personal awakening in North Korea's highest-security prison. It tells of the miraculous escape by Shin Dong-hyuk from the gulag in North Korea which has 200,000 inmates; a place where it believed that over 1 million prisoners have died. How did he get there in the first place?

*Mr. Shin's unforgivable crime was being born of "bad seed." His father was sent to Camp 14 because two of his brothers had fled south during the Korean War. Under an edict laid down by Kim Il Sung, founder of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the crimes of such traitors must be paid for by their relatives, "through three generations."*

He spent his entire life at Camp 14 and the camp ranks as a "total control zone" where prisoners are deemed "irredeemable." Growing up in such a place looks like this:

*For children at Camp 14, schooling consisted mainly of memorizing the camp's 10 rules. Rule No. 3: "Anyone who steals or conceals foodstuffs will be shot immediately." When Mr. Shin was in the first grade, his teacher discovered five kernels of corn in a classmate's pocket. The girl was required to kneel down in front of the class. Mr. Shin and his classmates watched as their teacher beat her to death. She was 6 years old.*

How does such a place still exist in our day and age? Wasn't this supposed to be over with slogans such as "Never Again!" after WWII? Wasn't the issue that lack of knowledge of such heinous crimes prevented them from being stopped and had we known then what was going on, it would not have happened? Apparently not. In fact you can see the N. Korean gulag today using Google Earth; some camps are as large as the city of Los Angeles.

But more importantly, how does such a place exist, philosophically? How does a nation get to a point where even an innocent child can be subjected to such a terrible fate? How does a nation allow itself to descend to such a low point as the Syrians have today, the Nazis of the past or ancient Egypt to destroy the most blameless members of society?

Freedom can only happen when there is the full realization that every person is created in a manner that the Torah mentions at the outset - that man was created in the image of God. When we understand this basic principle that every human is an expression of the Almighty and has an innate, eternal worth, then we appreciate that there is an infinite quality to every human being irrespective of their status, religion, wealth, beliefs or any other factor that makes some humans think that they are more worthy of others.

When a society loses this fundamental truth that all are created in God's image, it is just a matter of time before it will deem certain humans - even children - unworthy of basic rights, dignities and liberties.

This is what I penned in April 2012.

Well, as the *National Post* (Canada) and others reported this week, the UN has finally gotten around to condemning this humanitarian nightmare "by issuing a 374-page report detailing allegations of murder, torture, rape, abductions, enslavement and starvation, describing North Korea as a dictatorship 'that does not have any parallel in the contemporary world.'

Its leader, Kim Jong-un, was warned that he could face prosecution for crimes against humanity and Michael Kirby, a retired Australian judge who has spent nearly a year taking evidence from victims of the regime, said much of it reminded him of atrocities perpetrated by Nazi Germany."

While this nightmare needs to be addressed fully and comprehensibly by the international community to stop the suffering, these sort of things always bring the same thing to my mind whenever I read of them. I cannot help but compare them to the pressure Israel receives from its so-called inhumane behavior of the Palestinians. The BDS (Boycott, Divest and Sanctions) community in particular has been getting much press and even US Secretary of State, John Kerry parroted this new tact of alienation of Israel argument as a warning that Israel needs to bend over backwards and take some serious chances to hurry up and get on board with the peace process lest the world view Israel as a pariah state.

Really? You mean, like North Korea?

You know what I would like to humbly suggest to every Israeli leader and anyone else who is confronted with this so-called threat of BDS? Look them in the eye and ask them if they feel the same rage against the Russians who partner with Syria's butchering and exiling of its own people. Or if they feel the same degree of passion and indignation at China's support for North Korean Nazi-like concentration camps. Will they be organizing boycotts of China and Russia? No? Then quietly point out their blatant hypocrisy and tell them to go...

*Blow in the face of my rivals...*

*The men are surprised by the language  
They act so discreet, they are hypocrites, forget them  
So…*

-Belle and Sebastian

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