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1. This past summer, the N.Y. Times carried a series of articles by one of its astute columnists entitled THE AGE OF THE GIANTS. The author, in an attempt to explain the dynamics of the present American political set-up, maintains that our age is what it is primarily because it no longer has with it the giants, the great men of genius or near-genius, who used to lead its affairs. For instance, on the international scene we no longer have such people, like Roosevelt, Stalin, Churchill or De Gaulle who, whether we liked and agreed with them or not, were true giants. Science has lost its Plank and its Einstein. The one time Rockefeller and Fords who built financial empires from scratch are not to be found. Philosophy has lost its Whitehead and Dewey and James. Few if any of these great spirits remain, and the active control of the affairs of our age, in all fields, has fallen into the hands of lesser men. The AGE OF GIANTS has come to an end.
 2. In hearing this estimate of the secular, gentile world, it occurs to us that the same is true to such a large extent of the Jewish world. In the 1920s we still had with us in the Land of the Living all the illustrious leaders of European Jewry, too numerous to mention by name. Even America had its great ones - such as R. Jacob Joseph of New York. Then, in that decade, the great Chofetz Chayyim died. The next two decades saw the murder not only of millions of ordinary Jews, but thousands of Giants of Judaism and Jewry. This past year there died in Israel one of the last of the great Giants - the Chazon Ish z"tz"l. Alas, the Age of Giants for us Jews seems to have come to a close.
 3. Indeed, such an estimate seems to be an open invitation to pessimism and despair. With the GDOLIM, the Jewish Giants, gone, what can one expect of us ordinary Jews? As the Talmudic eulogizer put it centuries ago, IM BA'ARAZIM NAFLAH SHALHEVESS, MAH YAASU EZOVEI HA'KIR, if the giant cedar trees have been devoured by the flames, what shall the wall-flowers do? Can there be a bright future for our people under such conditions? Can Torah survive this disappearance of its giants?
 4. I ask this more than just as a rhetorical question. It is more than an invitation to a pep-talk. Psychologically speaking, it is a most crucial question. First, because many of our own people sometimes express such discouragement - sometimes when it flies into the face of facts that are just contrary to it. Second, because the non-Jewish world, or sections of it, would like to believe that. That historian Toynbee, about whom we've heard so much, delights in calling us "fossils" - dead remains of a once-living people - and predicts our disappearance from the face of the earth. And third and most important, because people generally are not willing to give their lives for a lost cause, whether it is right or wrong. Everyone wants to be on the winning side. Just look at the present political campaign: each party claims to be "in league with the future" and "the party of the future". * It is therefore important for us to try to peer behind the curtain of Time and take a glimpse of the future so as to feel that we are or are not "in league with the future". What DOES the future hold for an age which has witnessed the end of the GIANTS?
 5. The Torah, as amplified by the Tradition, gives us both the problem and its solution, all in one verse of today's Sidra. We are told first that Abraham had died - it was a rich, happy, and full life that was come to an end in dignity and in ripe old age. Abraham has died. His sons Isaac and Ishmael bury him. And here the Torah, it would almost seem, holds its breath for two sentences and describes the incidental details of where and how he came to his eternal rest. But then the stark realization must come - VAYEHI ACHREI MOS AVRAHAM - And it was after Abraham's death! The funeral was over, the Shiva was done - and the world was now faced with the dark and brutal and hard fact: the Giant of Giants was no more! The man who had by the force of his spirit stormed the heavens and wrested from the mouth the secret of One G-d; the man who had engaged that G-d in debate for the sake of the miserable sinners of Sodom; the man who was ready to sacrifice his beloved son for his principles; the man who changed the face of the earth and brought thousands upon thousands to this new belief in G-d, who transfigured his whole society and all who lived in it - he was dead, and you had to face it and accept it and live up to the fact. The AGE OF GIANTS had come to an abrupt and tragic end.

* and the "bird-story" is secondary, merely in matters of detail as pointed out.

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6. Had we lived at that time, we would have been engulfed by sudden ^{deluge} surges of pessimism, which would have overwhelmed us in succeeding waves of despair with each awakening realization that Abraham is no more. We would have stood by his bier and heard the GDOLEI HA'UMOS, the chiefs of all the peoples of that day, proclaim OY LO L'LOLAM SHE'AVAD MANHIGO, OY LAH L'SFINAH SHE'AVDAH KABARNITAH - woe to the world that has lost its leader, woe to the ship that has lost its captain. And into those pagan expressions of grief we probably would have read a feeling of delight: the unredeemed, pagan world could now go about its business as usual without an Abraham to summon it to greater destinies, to challenge its conscience...
7. Indeed, our Rabbis ^{commenting on the word} tell us that upon his death, CHAZAR HA'OLAM LA'ACHORAV, the world retrogressed, it went backwards, and the BE'EIROS, the wells which Abraham had dug, SASSMUM PLISHTIM, the Phillistines had choked off and closed down. Abraham was a GIANT; for the people of his day he opened the wellsprings of holiness, the source of kindness and generosity, the untapped reservoirs of human goodness. Now the little Phillistines had come in to fill the vacuum - so they filled the wells, stopped the flow of G-dliness and goodness that Abraham had initiated.
8. A black, well-nigh desparate situation indeed that had developed with the passing of the Giant Abraham. Surely his son Isaac was a saintly person - he had, after all, willingly submitted to the sacrifice at the Akedah as a man of 37. He was saintly, all-good. But he was not the powerhouse, the dynamo of G-dliness that Abraham was. In our sacred history Isaac, despite his holiness, is over-shadowed both by his father and his son. He had a brother Ishamel to contend with, and then a son Esau. He was blind - having lost his sight at the Akedah where he beheld the heavenly vision. And now - now he was left on his own. VAYEHI ACHAREI MOS AVRAHAM - the Giant had died. What now?
9. But the Torah doesn't stop there. True, Abraham was dead, and an era of greatness had come to an end. But in the very same breath, we hear the words: VAYVARECH ELOHIM ES YITZCHAK BNO G-d blessed Isaac his son! - there is a blessedness G-d bestows even upon those who are not Giants! There is a sacred and world-shaking responsibility on all men, especially when the Giants aren't here to assume the burden for us! There is a blessing to be developed and handed on to generations to come! Isaac, G-d must have told him, until now you lived in Abraham's shadow and could rely upon him, now yours is the duty of guarding the blessing, of transmitting the teachings of Abraham to your society and your children! Now you must come into your own! Continue the heritage of Abraham, the tradition of your father, and you will prepare the ground for future Giants who will spring from your lines, for Jacobs and Moseses and Isaiahs and Ezras and Akivahs and Rambams! Without your rising to the challenge they will never come into being. You are an indispensable link in the chain, for you can be the forefather of a people who will receive Torah! G-d will never allow the seed of Abraham to be destroyed, nor will He allow them to forget His Torah! And it is precisely when there are no Giants that every single Jew and Jewess must put his shoulder to the wheel of destiny!

That is what the BRACHAH was - the ability of lesser men to make good where before only Giants had succeeded. Only the pagan chieftains were able to say that the world is lost and the ship is sunk. Only the Phillistines stop off the wells. But the Isaacs gird their loins and go on with their holy work. For the Isaacs don't look at this moment alone and form judgments - they look at the whole expanse of Jewish history, and realize that where there were giants before, there will be giants later - provided that in the interim those who are not giants continue in their gigantic efforts at being loyal sons of Torah. No wonder then that when that verse concludes VAYEISHEV YITZCHAK IM BE'EIR LACHAY RO'I.... that the Aramiac translator in the Targum (yermishalmi) writes...V'YASSIV YITZCHAK SAMICH L'BIRA D'ISGALI ALOY YKAR CHAY V'KAYAM, D'CHAMI V'LO MIS'CHAMI...near the well where the glory of G-d sees, but is not seen. Few if any could have predicted then that out of this grieving Isaac would come a Holy Nation and Kingdom of Priests. Few could have seen the glory of G-d that accompanied Isaac thru a blessing. But G-d sees. G-d's perspective is limitless. Torah shall never be forgotten. The blessing will never die. There will be giants - a people of giants.

6. Looking back in Jewish history we find more than once that the situation looked so gloomy that any intelligent observer would freely have predicted the end of our people. The Prophets' complaint is constantly that their people are assimilating. And before the era of the Prophets - after the death of Joshua - our people remained despite their tendencies to imitate the GOYIM of that day - and this despite the fact that there were no giants to stem the tide.

(change above to: time of Shofetim, only chieftains, no real religious giants, and true that a lot of backsliding, but yet the tradition was kept alive, so that shortly afterwards there blossomed the era of the Neviim).

7. No, the Jewish people will not come to grief, chalilah, and the tradition of Torah will be kept alive. But this is the teaching of today's Sidra: when the Giants are not here to look after these treasures of our people, it is up to us ordinary people - who are, after all not ordinary at all but BNEI MLACHIM - to keep it up.

A recent article in a popular magazine states that one need not be a genius to "go places", that if the person of average IQ would use his brain-power to the fullest possible extent, he could learn and remember more than the greatest genius in the annals of human history!

8. Certainly, then, the end of the Age of Giants should not spell despair for us. If we are living in a time of crisis, as we surely are, let us not take a dim view of things. The giants are gone, and the world is in turmoil - crisis. But out of crisis can emerge greatness as well as destruction. In the Chinese idiom script, the word "crisis" is composed of two figures, one representing "danger" and the other "opportunity". If we will be lax and weak of heart, it may be a sign of danger. If we are strong and ready to summon up our greatest efforts for the glory of Torah and Israel, it will be opportunity. For then it will mean that each of us will rise to the demands of greatness and each of us will become a giant in miniature.

9. The last 10-20 years in America has proven that. Without those great and towering spirits, the Abrahams of modern times, we have advanced steadily by doing our duties, imposed upon us by G-d and Torah. Orthodoxy today is far stronger than it was a decade and a half ago, and with signs for increasing influence in the future. We must not judge Torah's success by the scene of the moment. We must look at things from a perspective - it is better than it was, and it shall be better yet later. That is the point of view of G-d - DCHAMI VLO MIS'CHAMI - the ability to see properly.

10. Maurice Samuel, in his latest book "The Professor and the Fossil" has a passage I believe worth quoting: ...As the modern world opens, Jewry and Judaism are still very much on the scene. A fascinating historical drama is revealed. The auctioneer is Time, the Buyer Oblivion. The peoples come up on the block, one after the other, the hammer is lifted, the established formula is intoned: "Going! Going! Gone!" But there is one people that appears on the block regularly, and over it the words "Going! Going!" have been repeated again and again; again and again it has looked like a sale; but the third word has never been pronounced over it.

11. And certainly we may add: that third word never will be pronounced over it. For VAYVARECH EIHIM ES YITZCHAK BNO, for we are a people of the blessing. Our greatness lies in the ability of Yitzhaks to replace Abrahams, of ordinary Jews to hold fast and firm when the Giants have gone, so that Giants may arise in the future.

12. Let us carry on that blessing with courage and unimpeded. Let us dwell at the side of BE'EIR LACHAY RO'I, at the well of Jewish life and learning which is Torah, so that although we may not always catch a glimpse of the glory of G-d and the Divine plan for our generations, we will always be visible to Him who is the SHOMEIR YISROEL, the Guardian of Israel. May He watch over us and bestow the blessing upon us.