

Aikev 5772

BS"D Parashat Aikev 5772

Devarim 8:9:

*A land where you will eat bread without scarceness, (a land) **which lacks nothing**; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig for copper.*

The following was sent to me by E-mail before Shabbat and deserves a reply:

Dear Rabbi Kahana,

Thank you so much for your words.

I wanted to reach out to let you know that when I mention to people that I read your Dvar Torahs every week, the reaction is "Why? He is anti-Rabanim. Be careful from his words, he speaks lashon hora about gedolim, i.e., Rav Ovadia Yosef, etc.

Here in..., talk of the Holy Land is a dream. I hear things like "We need to wait for Maschiach to bring us. There is lots of avodah to do here with the JEWS, there is no rush. The government is run by fools and will get Jews killed. You don't need to go to Israel to grow in Torah. Why be bound to join the army"

BH my family and I are making Aliyah in the very near future, and I hope to meet you someday and shake your hand for giving me a new fresh perspective on my Torah chinuch and for opening my eyes from its old narrow hashkafah."

signed...

Congratulations Mr... and family for your decision to close the door on your family's 2000-year exile and to come home.

The ideas and reactions quoted in your letter represent the mainline, paralyzed thinking of most of the one million religious Jews in the United States.

Of the six million Jews now in Eretz Yisrael, those who declared themselves in the last census to be religious or traditional make up about 80%. I would not be very wrong in saying that nearly all of these 80% agree with the basic premises of my writings: 1) there is a Torah mitzva to live in Eretz Yisrael; 2) there is no Halachic justification (although there are personal reasons) for a Jew to be in the galut today; and 3) the religious leaders there are not encouraging Aliyah but just the opposite, either passively by ignoring the issue or by directly telling their students, congregants or chassidim the statements quoted in your message.

There are two major reasons that I have been writing these messages over the last ten years.

Firstly, since I was born in Brooklyn and went through the chareidi yeshiva system, I know what was taught and what is being taught – and I know what is being left out. I can listen to any religious person from the States and know immediately what he believes, and where he is vis-a-vis the historical responsibilities placed upon the Jewish people in this generation.

I know what is in his mind. I know how secure he feels as an American and how much the "money" means to him. I am aware of how little the average religious person there knows of the Tanach and Jewish history, and that only about 20% of America's religious Jews have ever stepped foot in Eretz Yisrael, including rabbis and teachers of religious subjects.

Secondly, in my view, the task of a rabbi is to be responsible for the spiritual well-being of his community and students. But any rabbi who feels that this is his sole mission is not fulfilling his calling. From the great rabbinical leaders throughout the generations, we see that their first and foremost task was to care for the physical well-being of the people – their parnassa (livelihood) and certainly their very lives.

The rabbi maintained the tzedaka system in his community. He furthered commercial interaction in business. He told a woman who had recently given birth when she must eat on Yom Kippur, and unfortunately he also had to tell the people when and how to die on kiddush HaShem.

I see in the not-distant future the demise of the Jews in the galut through assimilation or by physical means. Rabbis everywhere have the responsibility to save the lives of Jews wherever possible. We rabbis in Eretz Yisrael have to cajole, beg, and sometimes insult in order to arouse the Jews to come home – here is where the ends justify the means.

Just for the record, I want to respond to the opening paragraph in your message. 1) I am not anti-rabbanim – I was born into a rabbinic family and have been a rav in Eretz Yisrael for 50 years. 2) We do not speak lashon hara in my family. To the best of my recollection, I have never mentioned Harav Hagaon Ovadia Yosef in my messages. I personally know Harav Ovadia Yosef; and, in fact, when he served as our Chief Rabbi he wrote a very warm approbation for the sefarim that I author. I have always been very careful never to criticize anything in Eretz Yisrael; certainly not any rabbinic personality. To criticize Eretz Yisrael in front of people who live outside is to be a partner with the miraglim.

To return to the matter of rabbinic responsibility.

Several years ago, after finishing a speech before a certain

organization in Yerushalayim, I opened the floor for questions. The first to speak was a very alert and clever elderly woman who asked me a question with tears in her eyes. She began,

“Ich bin ah poilishe,” (I am from Poland) from a little shtetl. Before the German invasion of Poland, my father went to our rabbi and asked for his blessings because my parents had decided to leave for Eretz Yisrael. But instead of his blessings, the rabbi tried to convince my father not to go to Eretz Yisrael. The following day we left Poland. We are the only survivors of our shtetl. Rav Kahana, why did the rabbi tell my father not to go to Eretz Yisrael?”

The tears in her eyes suggested the many relatives and friends who could have come to Eretz Yisrael but stayed in the shtetl and were murdered by the Germans.

I answered that there are many other instances where rabbanim told their followers not to go to Eretz Yisrael. Unfortunately, I cannot take away your pain, because I myself do not understand it – unless we come to the distressing conclusion that Moshe Rabbeinu did not succeed in eradicating the *meraglim* mindset from many of our leaders.

The next speaker was a gentleman with a familiar face, but I could not remember where we had met. He said that 13 years ago when he was in a quandary regarding himself, I was able to help him resolve the problem.

He related as follows:

“I was very far from anything that had to do with Eretz Yisrael. I was an American and had no wish to even visit Eretz Yisrael. One year, my wife nagged me to death (his words) that we should spend Pessach in Eretz Yisrael. I agreed on the condition that after the trip, Eretz Yisrael would never be mentioned again in our home. After arriving,

descending from the plane and walking several steps on the ground, something came over me and I felt that I could never leave.

I asked many rabbis to explain what had come over me at that moment, but no one was able to until you made it very clear.

You told me that the Hebrew word for coming to Eretz Yisrael is aliya, and that word is also used to describe being called up to the Torah. When one is called up to the Torah, the gabei calls you by your specific name. Likewise, no one comes to Eretz Yisrael until he or she is chosen for an aliya and his or her name is called out in the shamayim. You explained to me that HaShem invites people to His palace according to the neshama of the person and HaShem knew that my neshama would awaken the moment I walked on the soil of Eretz Yisrael."

I recalled the incident and thanked him for reminding me of it. I then turned to the woman "from Poland" who had so tearfully asked about her rabbi and said, " Here is the answer to your question. I cannot understand your rabbi, but it is clear that HaShem wanted your family here in Eretz Yisrael."

The rabbi of that *shtetl*, and others like him, are to be blamed for not encouraging their flock to return home. But their guilt is limited, because they did not have a precedent for what "enlightened" goyim of the 20th century would be capable of.

The situation today is quite different . No one can escape the knowledge of the past; and for those who did not read or hear about it, there are Holocaust museums galore.

Jews are encouraged today not to wear their kippahs while walking the streets of Paris – home of the French revolution – or of London – the home of the Magna Carta. The situation is not so bad yet in the US; although if the ground is not

burning there, dark clouds are lingering just beyond the horizon.

Life is no longer “business as usual” at times of economic insecurity and social unrest, which eventually find their expression in blaming the Jews – such as investment bankers like Lehman Bros., Bear Stearns, Goldman Sachs and the likes of Bernard Madoff.

When it comes to *piku'ach nefesh* (a life-threatening situation), there is no difference between a clear and present danger and between a *safek* danger. The rabbis in the various lands of the galut are playing with fire as they ignore the signs of anti-Semitism around them.

Although the return to Eretz Yisrael should be motivated by the recognition that it is here where HaShem wants a Jew to be and keep his Torah, anti-Semitism is a tool HaShem uses to arouse those who lack the spiritual sensitivity to realize where Jewish history is going. And for those who cannot see the approaching danger of living in the galut, it is the responsibility of the spiritual leader to lead his community to the Promised Land.

In view of the reality among my observant brothers and sisters in the galut and their spiritual guides, it is more than naive to think that there will be a meaningful and voluntary Aliyah in the near future. So my appeal to the rabbinic leaders of all sects and persuasions is to at least declare publicly that it is spiritually better to live in Eretz Yisrael than in the galut.

We should not lose sight of the simple fact that if the religious Jews of the United States would come here and vote in our parliamentary system, Medinat Yisrael would become a State based on the laws of the Torah.

In conclusion, our parasha states: ‘A land where you will eat bread without scarceness, (a land) **which lacks nothing**; a land

whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig for copper.'

Indeed, the land lacks nothing, except for one very important factor – not all her children want her.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

Copyright © 5772/2012 Nachman Kahana