

Aikev 5775

BS"D Parashat Aikev 5775

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

God's Eternal Gift to the Jewish Nation

Devarim 8:7-10

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For the LORD your God brings you to a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths, springing forth in valley and hills;

A land of wheat and barley, and vines and fig-trees and pomegranates; a land of olive-trees and honey;

A land where you will eat bread without scarceness, you will not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you may dig brass.

And you will eat and be satisfied, and bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.

The blessed land of Eretz Yisrael – God's eternal gift to the

Jewish nation.

Remember Tish'a Be'Av? It seems so far away, but not as far as the memory of what that day represents – the destruction of our two holy Temples in Yerushalayim.

I mention the 9th of Av because our parasha – Aikev, has much to do with how we conduct ourselves on that day.

Tish'a Be'Av is identified with fasting. Indeed, what is Tish'a Be'Av without fasting? Isn't it the very essence of the day?

But that is problematic. Tish'a Be'Av is a day of mourning. But mourning does not engender fasting. The most halachically severe laws of mourning are in effect for a parent who passed away. The mourning period for a parent is 12 months, for other relatives it is 30 days (in all cases kaddish is recited for 11 months). The rending of a mourner's garment is on the left side near the heart for a parent, for all other deceased relatives it is on the right side.

But, however severe the mourning over a parent, there is no halacha that requires the mourner to fast.

So why did the rabbis institute refraining from food on the national mourning day of Tish'a Be'Av?

I suggest:

Open a siddur to Birkat Hamazon (grace after meals) and carefully study the text.

In the first chapter we acknowledge that it is HaShem who provides sustenance for all things He created, and concludes with the blessing:

ברוך אתה יהוה 'ה שאתה רב

Blessed are You HaShem who sustains all

In chapter two we offer praise to HaShem for the basic foundations of our Jewish lives: The gift of Eretz Yisrael, the exodus from Egypt, Brit Mila (the sacred, eternal covenant between HaShem and the Jewish people), the gift of life and for the food that sustains us.

This chapter includes the verse in this week's parasha:

וְאָתְּמוֹתַי אֲכָלְתִּים וְשָׂבֵרְתִים וְבֵרַכְתֶּם אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם עַל הַיָּד הַטֹּבָה הַזֹּאת הַשְׁמַיְתָה לָכֵן

And you will eat and be satisfied, and bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.

The concluding blessing is:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַיָּד הַטֹּבָה הַזֹּאת הַשְׁמַיְתָה לָכֵן

Blessed are You HaShem for the land and for our sustenance.

Chapter three is our prayer to HaShem that He deal compassionately with His people Yisrael and His city Yerushalayim and Zion, restore the Davidic Monarchy and Bet Hamikdash.

It concludes with the blessing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ הַיָּד הַטֹּבָה הַזֹּאת הַשְׁמַיְתָה לָכֵן

Blessed are You HaShem who in His compassion rebuilds Yerushalayim. Amen

The above three chapters have the halachic status of a Torah based mitzva. The fourth chapter is a later rabbinic addition to commemorate the burial of the defenders of the great city of Betar, following the destruction of Yerushalayim. It also deals with the appearance of the Mashiach and ultimate redemption of the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael.

Birkat Hamazon is thoroughly Eretz Yisrael.

Our holy rabbis declared that Tish'a Be'Av and its "satellite" days of mourning over Yerushalayim (17th of Tamuz, 3rd of Tishrei, 10th of Tevet) should be days when we refrain from eating. Because eating would require us to recite Birkat Hamazon that permits us in some small way to identify with the Bet Hamikdash and Eretz Yisrael.

It was the rabbis' intention to heighten the feeling of total devastation at the loss of our Bet Hamikdash, the abolition of our national independence and our forced exile from Eretz Yisrael, to the extent that we may not even mention these holy matters even in Birkat Hamazon, because by refraining from eating we will not be obligated to recite Birkat Hamazon.

Unfortunately, millions of Jews have become accustomed to life in the "golden galut", and our once sharp religious-national reactions became dulled. The music in the word YERUSHALAYIM became commonplace, even wearisome, and Birkat Hamazon has become a tedious duty.

I am acquainted with holy people in Eretz Yisrael who wash for bread even when they are not hungry, just to become obliged to recite Birkat Hamazon and identify with the Holy Land, Yerushalayim and the Bet Hamikdash. (The same can be achieved when eating one of the "seven agricultural products of Eretz Yisrael" which requires one to recite "mai'ain shalosh", although it is not universally agreed upon that this blessing has a Torah status).

How strange, that a Jew living in Chicago and eating bread made from wheat grown in Kansas, declares the sanctity of Eretz Yisrael, Yerushalayim and the Bet Hamikdash. The kindest word I can find for this conduct is "ludicrous," but in reality it is much more serious than that.

My wife and I thank HaShem every moment for freeing us from that state of self-denial, when He permitted us to descend

1- At the time of the meraglim there was mass refusal to enter the Land.

2- Eighty percent of the nation refused to leave Egypt.

3- We do not wait to ask a boy if he agrees to undergo brit mila.

4- The Torah was forced upon the Jews at Mount Sinai when Hashem held the mountain above their heads threatening if they refused.

5- Chazal say that every person is born against his will.

The message here is that we mortals do not know what is good for us! So HaShem, out of His eternal love for the Jewish people, forced these values and ideals upon us, for our future in this as well as in the next world.

The Shoah was forced upon us and resulted in the establishment of the Medinah.

The Six Day War was not of our making. It resulted in the Medina increasing threefold, including the entire city of Yerushalayim.

The Yom Kippur War was forced upon us. At the war's end, Tzahal was 101 kilometers from Cairo and 35 kilometers from Damascus, after destroying and turning hundreds of millions of dollars of Russian armament into scrap metal, thereby advancing the downfall of the Soviet Union.

Ironic, but true, the military draft which is imposed on every young person, has created a huge increase in yeshiva learning and Torah scholars.

The unfortunate fact of life is that even after 3500 years of Torah we, and most of our religious leaders, are still not mature enough to distinguish between what is essential for a complete Jewish life and what is trivial. We still need HaShem

to take our hand and walk us across the road.

Torah without Eretz Yisrael is a soul without a body; Eretz Yisrael without Torah is a body without a soul.

To be an observant Jew today in the galut when the gates to Zion are open, is a failure of Torah education and a sign of perverted values. To be an Israeli who does not fulfill the Torah is the other side of this counterfeit coin.

However, as human events are evolving today – in direction and speed – our choices will become ever more limited. HaShem is bringing home to Eretz Yisrael those Jews who He deems to be meritorious. The others will go the way of so many before them, leaving no trace that they ever walked the face of the earth.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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