

Aikev 5776

BS"D Parashat Aikev 5776

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Use it or lose it

An orthopedist will tell you "use it or lose it" – exercise or the limb will eventually undergo necrosis (death of the cells).

So the title of this week's message is "Use it or Lose it".

The great traumatic crisis that faces Am Yisrael today is the mass departure, retreat, and abandonment, of millions of US Jews from their religious-historical-national ties to Judaism via intermarriage and related avenues leading to the golden gate of assimilation.

Why is this happening just now when the Jewish people are free to serve HaShem and fulfill our religious responsibilities as in no previous time in the past 2000 years?

I submit:

Friday of last week, we commemorated the festive day of the 15th of Menachem Av, which as stated in the Mishna (Ta'anit) as one of the two happiest days in the Jewish calendar year, the other being Yom Kippur.

The Talmud Yerushalmi in Ta'anit states that the 15th of Av is a joyous day for several positive things that occurred on it, one of them being the edict proclaimed by King Hoshea ben Elah of the ten northern tribes. The Gemara explains that on this day King Hoshea ben Elah rescinded a decree prohibiting the

Jews of the northern tribes to go up to Yerushalayim.

In order to fully appreciate what this meant we have to return 300 years prior to the time of Hoshea ben Elah. The arch-rasha (evil-doer), Yeravam ben Nevat incited the people of the northern tribes to secede from the union which was under the monarchy of Rechav'am son of King Shlomo. In order to complete the secession, Yeravam began interpreting the Torah in his own way, but the formal act of secession was accomplished by closing the roads to Yerushalayim and creating two substitute spiritual centers, one in Bet El and the other at Dan in the north.

Yeravam knew that as long as the connection to Yerushalayim existed his break away nation would not endure. Yeravam imposed a harsh prohibition on going to Yerushalayim and in order to maintain this rule he placed police and soldiers along the entire border. This situation continued for over 300 years, during which time the Jews of the north were severed from Yerushalayim and the Bet Hamikdash.

Hoshea ben Elah ascended the throne and withdrew the border guards opening the way to Yerushalayim; this occurred on the 15th of Av. Indeed, a day to parallel Yom Kippur for now the Jews would be able to offer korbanot in the Mikdash and achieve kappara for their sins.

After this explanation in the Talmud, a rabbi whose name was Rav Kahana asked that if Hoshea ben Elah was such a great man, why then in his time did HaShem permit Shalmanesser King of Assyria to invade the northern tribes and exile all the Jews?

To this the Talmud answers that Hoshea ben Elah indeed opened the way to Yerushalayim – BUT NO ONE CAME. And the king was held personally responsible, although he opened the way, because he did not use his authority to coerce his citizens to renew their connection with the holy city.

The Gemara explains that in the 300 years when pilgrimage to the holy city was prohibited by the evil kings, the heavenly bet din (court) could not accuse the northerners of neglecting their responsibilities to Yerushalayim. But now that the government permitted the free movement of people to the holy city there was no longer an excuse for not going. It was as if HaShem was saying, "You did not come to my house, so I will eject you from your houses", or "Use it or Lose it" – and exiled the Jews to the far fling lands to the east.

Seventy years ago the gates to Eretz Yisrael were thrown open to all Jews. The call was sounded to return home and receive immediate citizenship under the "The Law of Return". Very few came home from the Western countries; in fact, the year that we came on aliya in 1962, a mere 677 people came from the millions of Jew in the US.

2500 years ago, HaShem exiled the Jews from Eretz Yisrael for not going up to Yerushalayim. And although this dire sin is being repeated daily by the Jews in Western countries, HaShem cannot use the same punishment today as he did with the ten tribes. And this for the simple reason that they are already in exile.

So the question is: Anything short of a repeat Shoah, what is a fitting punishment for a people already in exile?

Answer: It is exile not only from the Jewish homeland – it is absolute banishment from the Jewish nation through assimilation.

The unaffiliated and "liberal" streams of Judaism are left to inter-marry as their punishment, and they will forever be lost to the Jewish nation.

For the religious Jew who does not come on aliya, there is a similar punishment. He is provided for with religious leaders

who fortify and uphold the rejection, prohibition, alienation and exclusion of their adherents from the Holy Land which they blindly base on so-called halachic reasons; like “wait for the Mashiach” or “there is chillul shabbat in Israel.” Thereby insuring that their adherents will remain in the galut until their children, grandchildren or great grandchildren will eventually inter-marry and disappear.

Use it or lose it

The Olympic games are over. The winners proudly display their medals around their necks, gold, silver and bronze and wait for the big company sponsors competing for their endorsements. Because when such illustrious people who can run so fast and jump so high endorse a product how can the teeming millions of “plain” people not put their hands in the pockets to purchase the product!

The payments to the lucky winners are in the millions of dollars, just for saying that he prefers a particular pair of sneakers or shaves with a certain razor blade.

Adidas would pay many many millions for the president of the US to endorse their running shoes, and tens of millions to the Pope for his endorsement.

How much would they theoretically pay for the Creator of heaven and earth to endorse an earthly product?

We find in the Tanach (24 books of the Bible) an endorsement of Eretz Yisrael which is called “ha’eretz ha’tova” – the good land, repeated 7 times: once by HaShem (Devarim 1,35); four times by Moshe (Devarim 3,25; 4,21; 4,22; 9,6); and Yehoshua in his book (23,15) and in Chronicles 1 (28,8).

The term “eretz tova” – a good land, stated by HaShem in Shmot 3,8 and by Moshe in Devarim 8,7.

Birkat hamazon (grace after meals of bread) and the closing blessing over cake, wine and those fruits which are indigenous to the holy land (al hamichya) are replete with praises for Eretz Yisrael.

We in Eretz Yisrael are spectators in the "Theatre of the Absurd". For despite all the above and more, when I speak to most American yeshiva students visiting or learning here all I get is negativism and criticism of HaShem's holy land and holy people. I get the feeling that something in their Jewish souls has died or was extinguished by their spiritual leaders, as my mentors attempted to do to me, before I escaped.

Tradition states that at some future time the Twelve Tribes will return to Eretz Yisrael.

I have the feeling that we shall see their return a lot sooner than the return of the American orthodox Jew.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

Copyright © 5776/2016 Nachman Kahana