

Balak 5774

BS"D Parashat Balak 5774

The kidnapping and murder of the three young yeshiva students – Naftali Frankel, Aiyal Yifrach and Gil'ad Sha'ar – has united the Jews in Eretz Yisrael to a remarkable degree. But now in the aftermath of the disclosure of their murder, despite all the prayers that were recited in every Israeli-minded bet kneset, will begin the heart-wrenching questions and doubts: Why did HaShem do this to the families and to the extended family of Jews in Eretz Yisrael?

In the absence of a prophet, no one can know for sure. However, we are still obligated to try to reach some understanding concerning these events for the present and future.

The following are my thoughts and feelings at this time.

Vayikra 21,8 regarding the unique sanctified status of Kohanim:

וְקִדַּשְׁתָּ אֹתוֹ (אֶת הַכֹּהֵן) כִּי יִשְׂרֹף אֶת-הַלֶּחֶם הַזֶּה לַיהוָה

And you shall sanctify him (a Kohen) because he offers up the sacrificial bread to HaShem

Tractate Yevamot 88b:

מִיְהוּדָה וְעוֹלָם, מִיְהוּדָה וְעוֹלָם? מִיְהוּדָה וְעוֹלָם

What is the source for the halacha that a Kohen who acts in defiance of his sanctified status is coerced by the court to repent, even through corporeal punishment?

[Answer] it is inferred from the word 'vekidash'- sanctify him even against his will

A Stiff-Necked People

In the second blessing of Birkat Hamazon, we offer thanks to HaShem for five things: Eretz Yisrael, the exodus from Egypt, Brit Mila, the Torah, and life itself.

Why did Yehoshua bin Nun, who authored this second blessing, mention these particular five?

I submit that they have a shared history: each one was rejected by the Jewish nation and was forced upon us by HaShem.

1. The Jews in the desert, under the influence of the miraglim, refused to enter the Land and 600,000 men between the ages of 20 to 60 died. Forty years later, under the leadership of Yehoshua, their descendants realized that they had no other choice and liberated the Land.

2. Eighty percent of the Jews in Egypt refused to leave and were subsequently killed during the plague of darkness.

3. An 8-day-old infant has no choice when circumcision is forced upon him.

4. HaShem held Mount Sinai above our heads and forced us to receive His Torah.

5. And regarding life itself, Pirkei Avot states that we are brought into this world against our will.

Hesitancy, Helplessness and Weakness of the Israeli

Leadership

The time for our redemption had arrived. The door was opened minimally with the Balfour Declaration of 1917. It was widened in the War of Independence when the Medina was declared in the thin strip of land from Haifa to Ashkelon. But HaShem threw the door wide open in the Six Day War when Yerushalayim, the Golan and the entire area of Eretz Yisrael west of the Jordan River returned to the Jewish nation as their rightful owners.

It was a time to be remembered, on the level of our entrance into the Land with Yehoshua and even more impressive than the return of our fathers to the Land in the time of Ezra to rebuild the Bet Hamikdash.

We had the moral and legal rights and opportunities to rid ourselves of all our enemies and settle the Land with millions of Jews who would come from the four corners of the globe. The cities of Shechem, Bet Lechem, Yericho, Shilo, Bet El and all the rest could have been great Torah centers with teeming numbers of our people bringing the Shechina back to the Temple Mount.

However, we lacked the vision and fortitude to grasp the historic opportunities presented to us by HaShem, and we left our enemies to plan and subvert, to kidnap and to murder.

By permitting them to remain, we interfered with the master plan of the world's Master. HaShem's timetable for the entire Jewish nation's return to Eretz Yisrael was held back by the hesitancy, the helplessness, and the weakness of the Israeli leadership.

As reflected in the words of the former Prime Minister Levi Eshkol who described Israel as "Shimshon ha'nebach" – Samson the pitiful – we are so strong, but we are afraid to use that strength.

As stated above, when a Kohen acts in a manner that defiles his sanctity, the religious court is obligated to coerce him into returning to the fold. Yehoshua in birkat hamazon pointed out the five things that HaShem forced upon us.

HaShem is coercing us to take the requisite actions for our national-religious redemption by arousing within us the necessary emotion of **anger**.

Dancing and singing when our sons are suffering is unnatural.

What is called for is anger. Not wild, uncontrollable, irrational, unmitigated, consummate anger so characteristic of our enemies, but anger that gives rise to decision making, determination, assurance, conviction, fortitude, and tenacity.

The phrase "charon af" in Ivrit refers to great anger. It appears in the book of Shoftim (Judges 14,19) when describing the great anger that engulfed Shimshon leading him to take revenge on the Philistines. And again in the book of Shmuel 1 (11,6) when King Shaul led Tzahal of the times to destroy the Amonites.

If HaShem does not involve Himself openly, directly and quickly in our affairs, then I fear we will have to experience more days of suffering and frustration before we merit leaders who will say in great anger "enough" and perform acts on the level performed by our forefathers in the Tanach.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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