

Bamidbar and Shavuot 5781

BS"D Parashat Bamidbar and Shavuot 5781

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Why Does Tragedy Strike Us?

The Tragic Events in Meron on Lag B'omer 5781

The tragic events in Meron on Lag B'omer seem so long ago because in HaShem's "divine little acre" challenge pursues challenge and headache pursues heartache.

That most people suffer in this world is axiomatic, but so too is the reality that HaShem's chosen people suffer most. Why?

There is a fundamental difference between why humanity as a whole must suffer anguish, and the suffering of Am Yisrael. Gentiles are punished because of their evil ways. The purpose of Jewish suffering is not to punish, but to serve as a warning and a signal from HaShem for us to redirect our failing ways.

I have felt for years that Meron would be the place for a tragedy – one that would grip the nation and hopefully shock us to return to Jewish sanity.

Every year before Rosh HaShana, tens of thousands of Israelis leave the Holy Land in order to re-charge their spiritual batteries in preparation of drawing closer to HaShem in the town of Uman – in that immense Jewish cemetery called Ukraine. And every year, hundreds of thousands of Israelis throng in

pilgrimage to the town of Meron in the upper Galil to unite in religious fervor through the kindling of the fire in their souls via the glorious fires of Chassidic rebbes.



Both the trekkers to Uman and the olei regel of Meron share a common flaw – Yerushalayim and the Temple Mount are excluded from their religious equation! Where is Har HaBayit when these pilgrims are being enthralled and enraptured in their religious commitments? The “Mountain of HaShem” is bleak and silent, except for the Islamic heirs of Hitler defiling the holiest precinct of Am Yisrael with their presence.

Then the hatchet fell. On Friday, Lag B’Omer the 18th of Iyar, in the week that we read from the Torah parashat EMOR, 45 Jews were trampled to death in Meron.

The Tragic Earthquake of 5597

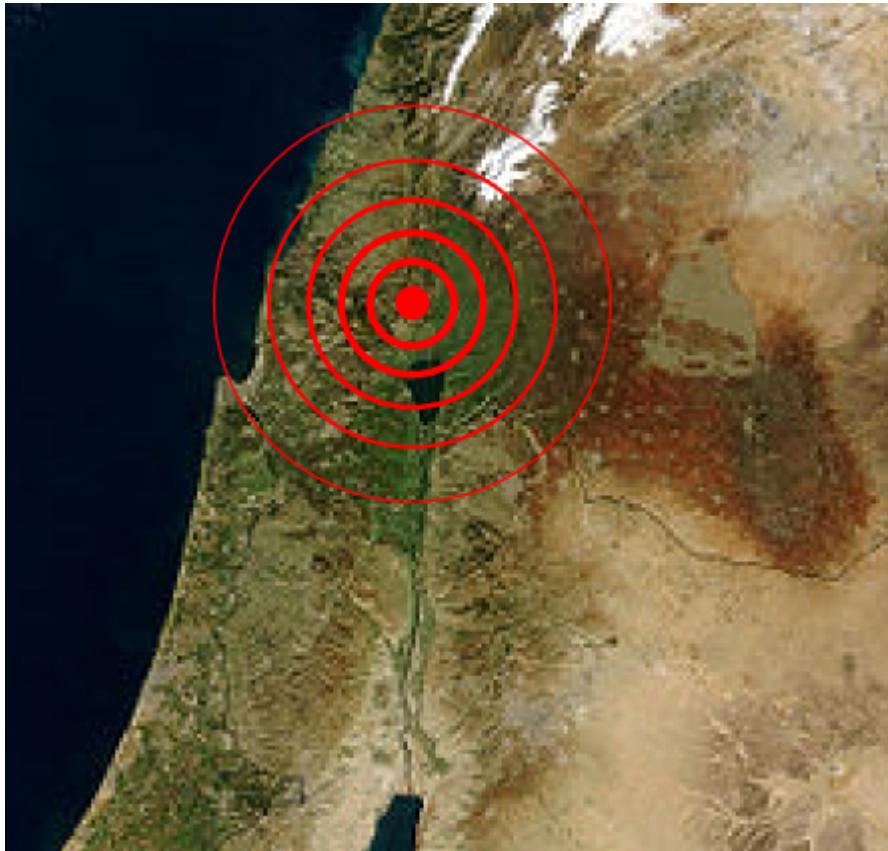
In 1837, a tragic earthquake occurred in the north of the country. The towns of Tiveria, Shechem and 30 other villages were affected, with the death of thousands and the destruction of homes and lives. The worst affected was the town of Tzfat.

The illustrious Chatam Sofer (1662-1739) spoke in his bet

midrash after the event and recorded his drasha in his commentary on the Torah (Torah Moshe).

The following is an excerpt from his drasha.

The earthquake was the expression of HaShem's zealousness for the honor of Yerushalayim, for HaShem is righteous in all His ways. Yerushalayim is the "Gateway to Heaven," the city united with the spiritual world. Therein is the site of Mount Moriah where Avraham was prepared to sacrifice his son Yitzchak. There Ya'akov saw in a dream the ladder connecting the worlds. There is the place of the Bet HaMikdash towards which all Jews face in prayer; the place where the Shechina never abandoned the Western Wall.



Now it has come to pass that for the past one hundred years, people have been making their way to the area of Tzfat where Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai is interred at Meron and Ha'Ari is buried in Tzfat. All the olim turn only to Tzfat and Tiveria – while Yerushalayim is forgotten. Yerushalayim where HaShem's name is rooted in the word Yerushalayim. And even in our time there is a mitzva to make a pilgrimage to Yerushalayim.

The Chatam Sofer bemoans the rejection of Yerushalayim in favor of Tzfat and Meron as the cause of the devastating earthquake and records the day he said this drasha:

וְיַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה כָּלֵב אֶת־מִצְרָיִם וְיַעֲשֵׂה כָּלֵב אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל 'וְיַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה כָּלֵב אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיַעֲשֵׂה כָּלֵב אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל . וְיַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה כָּלֵב אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל .

SUNDAY, THE SECOND OF IYAR 5597 (1837), THE WEEK WE READ FROM THE TORAH PARASHAT EMOR.

The Chatam Sofer made his public declaration on the week of Shabbat Emor, and the tragedy of Lag B'Omer occurred on the week of parashat EMOR.

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Brachot chapter 9 halacha 2) records a discussion between the Prophet Eliyahu and Rabbi Nehorei regarding the causes of earthquakes. Rabbi Nehorei said the cause is the Jews' transgressions in the matter of separating the various tithes. Eliyahu corrected the Rabbi and said that the reason is that HaShem sees the theaters and arenas in the world built beautifully, while His Holy Temple lays desolate on the Temple Mount.

This is one more of many other sources that place the blame for unnatural events on the Jewish people who continue to reject our responsibility to restore our former glory on the Temple Mount.

Yom Yerushalayim

Before we have to witness another tragedy, I suggest that we place our religious loyalties on Yerushalayim and specifically on the Temple Mount.

Continue to go to Uman if that's what your neshama craves and to Meron if that is what brings you to a spiritual high. However, the focal point of our yirat shamayim is the Temple Mount. A day must be set aside for hundreds of thousands of our people – more than are counted in Meron and Uman – to celebrate the unprecedented miracle of Am Yisrael being again sovereign over the site where the Bet HaMikdash will stand again. There is no better day than the 28th of Iyar, Yom Yerushalayim, and the yahrzeit (anniversary of the passing away) of the prophet Shmuel. The Gemara (Zevachim 54b) states that Shmuel, together with David, were the authorities who pinpointed the exact site to serve as the Temple Mount.



There is a simple reason why, on this day and on every day, there must be a large presence of Jews on the Mount – If you believe HaShem gave it to you, then take it! If you don't take it, someone else will, because in this world every vacuum becomes filled.

There is so much more to say about the Temple Mount and the future Bet HaMikdash, but it might be sufficient just to quote the ceasefire order of General Motta Gur to the troops in 1967 when he said:

A row of 10 empty rectangular boxes for writing in.

The Temple Mount is in our hands.

But I must add an extension:

The Temple Mount is in our hearts.

Shabbat Shalom and have a meaningful Chag Shavuot,

JLMM Jewish Lives Matter Most

Nachman Kahana

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