

Be'ha'alotcha 5776

BS"D Parashat Be'ha'alotcha 5776

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Missing the profound spiritual nature of the mitzvot

Did you ever consider, why we Jews, the cleverest people on earth, abide by a God-given Torah which no one understands?

We know when to perform the respective mitzvot and how to perform them to the most minute detail, but even the greatest rabbi cannot explain the essence of any mitzva.

Countless numbers of Jews from time immemorial have sacrificed their lives in defense of their right to keep the Torah; yet no one knew why shrimp is prohibited, or why a mikva drives away tuma, or why leavened bread causes the dire punishment of karet on Pesach.

In order to understand why the Creator demands such un-intellectual adherence to the Torah while decreeing that the study of the legal details is of utmost importance, we have to turn to the Midrash Tanchuma (parasha Aykev chap. 11.)

The Midrash relates that when the people sinned with the Aygel Hazahav (Golden Calf), HaShem informed Moshe of His intention not to give the Torah to Am Yisrael.

Then there transpired a colossal tug-of-war. Each Luach (stone tablet) was six tefachim long (a little more than half a meter) and three tefachim wide. HaShem held the top two

tefachim in an attempt to keep the Luchot for the heavenly angels, while Moshe held the bottom two tefachim struggling to bring them to earth, and between HaShem and Moshe the Luchot shattered.

What is the meaning of this midrash?

Herein lies the essence of the Torah we received at Sinai and the answer to our questions regarding the absence of understanding of mitzvot.

Initially, it was HaShem's intention to give us the Torah with full understanding of the mitzvot and their spiritual consequences in this world and their implications in the next world. But in the wake of the Aygel Hazahav disaster, Hashem told Moshe of His decision not to give the Torah to Am Yisrael.

Moshe refused to accept this reversal of HaShem will, and thus began the inconceivable struggle between finite man and the infinite Creator. This is characterized by the Midrash with HaShem grasping the top part of the Luchot and Moshe the bottom.

The breaking of the Luchot represented the compromise agreed upon between the sides; Am Yisrael would receive the Torah, but without understanding of the profound spiritual nature of the mitzvot. Hence to this day, we perform the mitzvot but have no idea what they mean and their consequences beyond the superficial reasons laid forth for them. Kashrut, para aduma, tuma and tahara etc, are all mysteries enveloped in an enigma.

When will HaShem forgive Am Yisrael and reveal the hidden mysteries of the Torah, as He had originally planned?

In the book of Midrashim [expository explanations] called Yalkut Re'uvaini it is brought that, in the future, HaShem will gather in the Jews from the various exiles and provide them with fabulous wealth. And for those Jews who will have

Pesach commemorates the physical freedom of the Jewish nation from human bondage, and Shevuot commemorates our freedom from immoral, idolatrous human behavior and our entry into HaShem's infinite world of sanctity.

HaShem presented His Torah to Am Yisrael while the heavens ignited with fire, as described in Shemot 19,18:

הַר סִינַי נִכְרַח עָשָׂן כִּי יָרַד אֱלֹהִים בְּאֵשׁ מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם
וַיִּבֶן עָשָׂן וַיִּשְׂרָף מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיִּבֶן עָשָׂן וַיִּשְׂרָף מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם:

Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently.

HaShem ignited the Jewish soul so that its flame would "rise up" smoothly by itself forever. And indeed HaShem's chosen nation has collectively risen to the occasion. One need only consider other peoples, nations and races, who have undergone experiences of colonization and slavery for the same amount of time that we suffered in Egyptian bondage, about 200 years. The others may have shed the shackles of physical slavery, but most have retained the cultural, intellectual and societal features of slavery. Whereas, the Jewish nation has risen far above all other members in the family of nations by virtue of the Torah we received at Mount Sinai.

It is imperative for the conscious Jew to judge himself on how much he or she has risen to the ideals and standards established by our Father in Heaven.

There are several ways to judge one's self. I would suggest the following:

In Kabbalistic terms, the purpose of Creation was for the Jewish nation to provide the Creator with nachat ruach (the satisfaction a parent feels upon seeing the fidelity and love

of his child); with the precondition that we function “lishma” – without ulterior motives of personal pleasure or gain.

A while back, my wife and I were at a barbecue in honor of the son’s army unit. He was serving in the elite Golani reconnaissance unit, whose function in wartime is to make contact with the enemy and engage it in a firefight until the larger units of the army arrive. It is an all-volunteer unit, whose initial “fight” by the young men is to be accepted into the unit.

Twenty-five soldiers came to enjoy the good food and a few hours of much deserved rest. The aroma of the steaks on the grill filled the garden with all the other condiments. Just before sitting down to partake, one of the soldiers announced “Mincha”, and 20 of the 25 including their lieutenant began davening.

“Not such a great story,” you might say; but it’s really a very great story, because herein lies the future of Am Yisrael.

There was a time when a dati young man would not be accepted into any of these elite units which were the “traditions” of the secular kibbutz movement. Now there is no unit in Tzahal, including fighter pilots and submariners, where there is no dati presence.

But this is only part of my story. The young men in the garden volunteered for the most dangerous units with no thought for themselves. They served the God of Am Yisrael by defending His Holy Land “Lishma” – for the sake of sanctifying HaShem’s name in Eretz Yisrael.

But this story contains a sub-story. While we were enjoying the barbecue, the baal habayit (host) was serving his 30 days in reserve duty as a captain in a tank unit. The father in his 40s and the son in his early 20s, both in uniform. He has 6 children, which exempts him from military service. Yet he

serves in this front-line position, while losing a large part of his income from his work as a project manager of major construction projects in Yerushalayim. He has a younger brother who has 9 children; he too serves voluntarily, as well as a brother who is a very senior officer in Tzahal.

Why do they do it? Because the essence of a Jew is to bring nachat ruach to HaShem by our pure actions.

At this point in the Shevuot period, we should all look into ourselves and make a reckoning of why and how we perform mitzvot.

We who have left the comfortable lands of our birth to return to our ancient Holy Land have done so, for the most part, not to improve our material status but to bring nachat ruach to HaShem by letting Him know that even after 2000 years of galut we are still His loyal sons and daughters.

Our beautiful and holy children who serve here in defense of this holy land and its holy people, do not think of careers, shiny cars, or skiing weekends at Aspen; they are too busy cleaning their rifles and tank cannons in preparation for the next challenge.

So every moment the flame in these young men "rises up" in the service of HaShem, and as they rise up, they cause all the Jews in Eretz Yisrael to ascend with them.

P.S. On the 49th day of the "counting," a Moslem murdered 49 people in Orlando Florida. And his name was "Omar". Is there a message in this for the Jews in the United States?

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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