

Behar 5779

BS"D Parashat Behar (Emor in the galut) 5779

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

A Pesach question: After completing the rabbinic mitzva of bedikat chametz (searching for chametz) we burn the chametz, the spoon and feather, and also the candle. Why the candle? It did not touch the chametz nor even come close to it. I will return to this.

Modern-Day Spiritual Role Models

Last week I received a disturbing video regarding a kosher sandwich shop in Lakewood New Jersey. The proprietor had hung an Israeli flag on the roof next to a US flag in honor of Yom Ha'Atzmaut. He received a call from the rabbi who gives the hechser on kashrut; that if the Zionist flag was not removed immediately, he would cancel the kashrut certification of the shop. He was not an OU kashrut rabbi but was sanctioned by one of the chareidi organizations in the area.

This “rabbi” reminded me of an interview I heard a while back with a chareidi leader of Yerushalayim who said on the radio that the Israeli flag was just “a shemata (rag) on a stick”.

I am dedicating this week's devar Torah to these two “great” spiritual role models. It is an excerpt from my soon to be published book, “Reflections from Yerushalayim”.

In your yeshiva learning or rabbis' speeches etc., did you ever come across the following names:

Shlomo ben Yosef, Dov Gruner, Mordechai Alkachi, Yechiel

Drezner, Eliezer Kashani, Yaakov Weiss, Avshalom Chabiv, Meir Nakari, Meir Feinstein and Moshe Barazani?

No?

Then how about these:

Yishmael ben Elisha, R. Shimon ben Gamliel Hazaken (senior), R. Chanina ben Tradion, R. Akiva, R. Yehuda ben Bava, R. Chutzpiet Hameturgaman (the translator), R. Yeshovav Hasofer (the scribe), R. Chanina Sgan Hakohanim, R. Chanina ben Chachai, R. Yehuda ben Dama, and R. Elazar ben Shamua – Zichronam Li'veracha

A bit more familiar?

We will return to all these immortal Jewish giants of saintly memory.

Our parshat Shemot 5:14, the Torah relates):

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The foremen of the Children of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had appointed over them, were beaten, saying 'Why did you not complete your requirement to make bricks, as yesterday and before yesterday, even yesterday and even today?'"

Rashi explains:

The 'shotrim' (foremen) were Jewish overseers of the Jewish slaves. The shotrim had compassion on their fellow Jews and did not forcefully coerce them to fill the irrational daily quota of bricks. And so, at the end of each day, when the production did not fill the quota demanded by the Egyptians, the Egyptian taskmasters would beat the Jewish overseers.

In return for their self-sacrifice these shotrim were later chosen by HaShem to be the founding fathers of the first Sanhedrin.

Their reward in this world, however great, cannot in any way compare with their reward in Gan Eden, as the Talmud states (Bava Batra 10:b):

תְּבִשְׁתָּהּ תְּבִשְׁתָּהּ תְּבִשְׁתָּהּ תְּבִשְׁתָּהּ תְּבִשְׁתָּהּ – תְּבִשְׁתָּהּ תְּבִשְׁתָּהּ

In the World to come, no one can enter into the portals of those who were murdered by governmental decree (of the Romans for being Jews).

Rashi explains that one example of this were the two Jewish brothers, Lulainus and Papus from the city of Ludkia (Lod) who were murdered by Turnes Rufus (the Roman proconsul), when they voluntarily admitted falsely to murdering a Roman woman in order to remove blame from the entire Jewish community.

When a Jew comes forward to make the ultimate sacrifice for his fellow Jews, there is no greater act in the eyes of HaShem.

The second set of ten names mentioned above were the legendary "Ten Martyred Rabbis" whom we recall in our prayers on Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av. Their memory and self sacrifice will

never cease from our collective national memory; for they became the founding fathers of Jewish martyrdom, and they have been emulated by millions of our brothers and sisters until this very day.

But who were the first set of men whose names appear above: Shlomo ben Yosef and his ten compatriots? Why did we never hear of them? What are they to us?

These ten tzaddikim were the ten martyred underground freedom fighters, members of the Etzel and Lechi military organizations, who were hanged by the British in the days of the British Mandate over Eretz Yisrael. And they became the founding fathers of the Third Jewish Commonwealth established in 5708 (1948) in Eretz Yisrael.

The ten martyred rabbis were the best our people had known in one single generation, and they died for the “crime” of keeping, and teaching, the Torah to our nation. The ten modern martyrs were not rabbis, but they had a virtue which the rabbis did not have. The rabbis were captured by the Romans and murdered without having a choice in the matter; whereas, eight of the ten modern martyrs were put on trial and told that if they recognized the authority of the British military court their sentences would be commuted to life imprisonment. Each one, in his time, declared to the court that they did not recognize the authority of any gentile entity in Eretz Yisrael; and they were summarily executed in Acco and in Yerushalayim.

Meir Feinstein and Moshe Barazani were about to be hanged in Yerushalayim but committed suicide by exploding a hand grenade which was smuggled to them in order to preempt the British lust for hanging Jews.

The first to be hanged, Shlomo ben Yosef, was captured by the British in April 1938 for attempting to avenge the murder of nine Jews a month before, on their return to the city of Tzfat

from a wedding in Haifa. One of those murdered was my aunt Tzipora, wife of my uncle Harav Mordechai Kahana, her elderly mother and two cousins, HaShem Yinkom Daman (May God avenge their blood), were also murdered.

The Jewish State has a flag and an anthem. The flag consists of two wide blue stripes on a white background. The inspiration behind the design is the striped tallit. The Arabs claim that the two stripes represent the Euphrates River in the north and the Nile in the south which are the ultimate goals of the Jewish State – halevei (if only)!

Is the flag holy in a halachic sense? May one trample it when angry at some foolish or evil decision taken by our government? Should we be incensed when seeing Iranian or Arab mobs trampling on our flag?

The national anthem of Israel is “Hatikva.” Must we stand when it is played, perhaps like the “kedusha” when the chazan repeats the Amidah prayer? Did you know that the subject of the second stanza of Hatikva is the Beit HaMikdash? Should it be sung at our special occasions, such as a bar mitzva or wedding?

Foolish questions, you might say! Indeed not!

The Halacha states that prior to burial we clean the body as one does to a new-born baby, to signify that the end of life in this world is the birth of the soul in the next world. But if there is blood on the body or on its clothing, it is buried as is (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Dei’ah 364,4) because we do not “wash away” the life blood of a Jew.

The blood of these young men, and over 25,000 other soldiers and civilians of Eretz Yisrael, covers our flag and is also the background “music” of the anthem. One who does not feel the sanctity of the flag and the song which signifies our national renaissance has fallen victim of the galut.

Now for the gnawing question:

We are taught of the great personal sacrifice of the Jewish overseers in Egypt. We know the names of the ten great martyred rabbis of 2000 years ago; and even the two brothers of Lod are part of our tradition. So why are our rabbis and educators derelict in not informing us of the ten martyred tzaddikim in whose merit the brutish British were forced to eventually leave Eretz Yisrael, leading to the establishment of the Jewish State?

I suggest:

The Jewish people are unique. We are a family, a race, a religion, and a nation, all in one. However, in the course of the 2000 year long punishment of being exiled from our national home, we emphasized the intimate relationship of the individual aspect of "God and me", an ideology in which personal survival and religious perfection overshadowed, and nearly eradicated the national aspect of "HaShem and us".

The antagonism of many of our religious leaders towards Zionism's call to return home to renew the "AM ECHAD" (one unique nation) aspect of Klal Yisrael indicates just how great a toll the galut has taken on our national identity.

To acknowledge events of 3300 years ago in Egypt, or 2000 years ago under Roman occupation of Eretz Yisrael does not impel us with feelings of responsibility to aspire to anything higher than our mundane existence. Whereas, the great acts of meserat nefesh (personal sacrifice) performed in our own time for the sake of what is necessary for our Jewish national and religious survival today, create conscience pangs which interfere with our pursuit of comfort and luxury. If young men voluntarily gave their lives in the creation of an independent Jewish homeland in Eretz Yisrael, how can I remain aloof and not join my brothers and sisters in the Holy Land?

But thank G-d, the Jewish ability to improvise is ever

present. Just ignore the martyred tzaddikim of Yerushalayim and Acco. Don't inform your children. Don't tell your students, so now we can remain enraptured with the great traditions of mesirat nefesh of yesteryear and not be troubled by the burdens of today's national-religious demands.

Why do we burn the candle?

To the original question: why do we burn the candle after bedikat chametz? The sole purpose of the candle is to seek out the negative, the unwanted, the undesirable, the chametz; it deserves to be burnt. There are segments in the Chareidi cult (of course not all) whose sole goal is to point out the negative aspects of our holy Medina. In their eyes Medinat Yisrael can do no good; when in fact the greatest financier of Torah in the world is Medinat Yisrael. We don't have 70% intermarriage with goyim as you have but thank HaShem we have a great number of "intermarriages" in our population: Sefaradim to Ashkenazim, Moroccans to Algerians, Poles to Lithuanians – Baruch HaShem.

A shop raises the flag of Medinat Yisrael on our Yom Ha'atzmaut and the chutzpa of this 'rabbi' to threaten to rescind his kashrut certification.

I would chance a wager that with or without his certification, the shop keeper's kitchen is as kosher as the mashgiach's; but with one difference: the store owner has a Jewish heart, the "rabbi" has a heart of stone.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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