

# Bereshiet 5773

## BS"D Parashat Bereshiet 5773

Ten years ago, on the 24th of Tishrei 5763, Sargent Ari Weiss z"l fell in a firefight in the city of Shechem; Ari was 20 years old. Ari is the son of Rav Shmuel and Susie Weiss, one of the leading rabbinical families in the city of Ra'a'nana, where Rabbi Weiss is the director of the Jewish Outreach Center of Ra'anana.

I was scheduled to speak at the occasion of Ari's tenth "yom hashana", but unfortunately a last minute illness prevented me from attending.

A Jewish soldier defending Eretz Yisrael fell at the hands of today's Amalek. That should not happen. A Jewish warrior goes out to fight for God's chosen people returns home to resume his life. Jewish soldiers are not supposed to die on the battlefield!

Indeed, there are over twenty two thousand warriors of Zahal who are at rest in the military cemeteries scattered throughout the land, and the fact remains that not one of them deserved to die. What happened?

It is not me who is voicing this question before HaShem. The first to do so was Yehoshua Bin Nun.

The Book of Yehosua relates that after the miraculous victory at the city of Yericho, the next Canaanite place that was to be taken, as the Jews moved westward, was the small town of Iy. Yehoshua's generals suggested that there was no need for the entire Jewish army to capture the town; 3000 soldiers would be sufficient. Yehoshua sent 3000 soldiers and they were defeated, with the dire result that one Jewish warrior was killed. His name was Yair Ben Menashe, who was equal in Torah

knowledge to half the Sanhedrin of 71 judges.

Yehoshua was devastated! How did it happen that a Jewish soldier was killed while partaking in the major mitzva of liberating Eretz Yisrael? Jewish soldiers don't die in battle!

Yehoshua chapter 7:6-11:

*6 Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell face down to the ground before the ark of the Lord, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads.*

*7 And Joshua said, "Alas, Sovereign Lord, why did you ever bring this people across the Jordan to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us? If only we had been content to stay on the other side of the Jordan!"*

*8 Pardon your servant, Lord. What can I say, now that Israel has been routed by its enemies?*

*9 The Canaanites and the other people of the country will hear about this and they will surround us and wipe out our name from the earth. What then will you do for your own great name?"*

*10 The Lord said to Joshua, "Stand up! What are you doing down on your face?"*

*11 **Israel has sinned;** they have violated my covenant, which I commanded them to keep. They have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen, they have lied, they have put them with their own possessions.*

HaShem informed Yehoshua that "Israel has sinned", implying that the community of Israel caused the catastrophe of a Jewish warrior being killed in battle.

Yehoshua investigated the matter and disclosed that one man,

Achan Ben Karmi, violated the Torah by stealing several items that were taken from Yericho and sanctified for the Mishkan. Achan was put to death by HaShem's command.

As it turned out, what HaShem said to Yehoshua 'Israel has sinned' was in fact the sin of only one man – Achan Ben Karmi – that brought down the righteous Yair Ben Menashe.

Why was Yair Ben Menashe chosen to pay for Achan's lust for money? And why was Achan put to death just for stealing?

The accounting principles of the Almighty, that when Achan of the tribe of Yehuda sinned, Yair of the tribe of Menashe paid the ultimate price are beyond human comprehension. But the principle is in effect: Jewish soldiers die in battle when other Jews sin and cause the midat hadin (the Quality of Harsh Justice) to prevail.

But the severity of Achan's act that incurred the death penalty can be more readily understood.

The Jewish nation's sojourn in the Sinai desert for 40 years was no secret. Millions of people, living in a hostile desert environment, yet having food and water, could not be overlooked. The Midrash states that there was commercial and theological contact between the Jews and other nations.

The Jews' objective of entering the Holy Land was no secret. But the Canaanite nations in Eretz Yisrael were not overly worried, because between them and the Jews were the two invincible kings, Og King of Bashan and Sichon King of the Emmerites, who led these buffer states.

However, after 40 years of wandering in the desert, Moshe Rabbeinu and the Jewish army totally annihilated these two buffer states and were on their way to cross the Jordan river. At this point any gentile in the Holy Land who possessed a degree of self preservation left the land or was preparing to do so, because no one could stand before the "steamroller" of

God's chosen people.

Yehoshua entered and destroyed Yericho. By this time, probably half the gentile population had already escaped from Eretz Yisrael. Then came the disaster at Iy, caused by the sin of Achan. And when the gentiles saw that the Jews could be defeated, they concluded that it was better to remain and fight, and not leave.

Yehoshua conquered the land, but the remaining goyim influenced many of the Jewish nation to adopt their idolatrous ways, which eventually caused the destruction of the First Bet HaMikdash.

The result of the heinous sin of Achav was the empowerment and encouragement of the goyim to deny HaShem's gift of the Holy Land to the Jewish people, and their determination to remain in Eretz Yisrael. Achan's sin brought about the death of a Jewish warrior, Yair Ben Menashe, and resulted in changing Jewish history. For this, his punishment was nothing less than death.

We all sin. Indeed, there is no escaping the tyranny of the yetzer harah, as stated by Shlomo HaMelech (Kohelet chap. 7)

*There is not a tzaddik in the world who does good and never sins.*

There are sins which go no further than staining an individual's neshama; but there are sins which carry with them history changing implications.

**At this time in our history, when HaShem has opened the gates to Eretz Yisrael, yet so many observant Jews, including prominent rabbis do not come, the message to the goyim in Eretz Yisrael and around the world is that HaShem did not give us Eretz Yisrael, for if He did why are these prominent religious leaders not in the Holy Land?**

Because of this dire sin, equal in its political and historical consequences to what Achan Ben Karmi did, young Jewish soldiers die.

We have just completed a month and a half of self contemplation and teshuva. Our national problem is indeed all the transgressions we recited five times on Yom Kippur in "Al Chet", but none can compare to the transgression of remaining in the galut while the hand of Hashem is outstretched to his people beckoning them to return and establish the foundation for the final redemption of the Jewish nation.

There is no better time than parashat Bereshiet for one to make a resolution to leave the exile and return home.

I wish to conclude with an incident involving the great gaon Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l. A student in the yeshiva requested permission to go to the Galilee to pray at the graves of the illustrious tzaddikim buried there. The Rav answered, "Why do you have to travel to the Galilee when one kilometer from the yeshiva is the military cemetery on Mount Hertzl, where there are hundreds of the nation's greatest tzaddikim!"

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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