

BS"D Parashat Ki Tisa-Purim

5783

Purim's Message for Us Today

During the many years when I had the unique zechut (privilege) to serve as the rav of the Chazon Yechezkel bet knesset in the northern quarter (Moslem) of the Old City, I had the opportunity to meet and help people who were being challenged in their personal lives. I would like to bring two incidents from which all of us can glean a bit of understanding.

Incident 1: Can you murder your soul?

An acquaintance turned to me with a serious problem. He had an 18-year-old daughter who was normative in every way, a good student with a wide circle of friends, a good daughter and sister to her siblings. Suddenly every changed. She became introverted, left her studies and stopped meeting with her friends. The father took her to psychologists, to no avail. But a few days previous to his call to me she broke down and told her father that, in her words, she "killed her neshama" (soul). At this point the father understood that she had to speak to a rabbi, not only to a medical person. He requested that I speak to her. I agreed but admitted that I couldn't promise results.

The young lady and I met a few days later. After several moments of trying to gain her confidence, she stated that she had "murdered her soul".

I listened quietly trying to gain more information, but she

was not forthcoming.

So, my time came to speak. I told her that there is nothing that she could ever do to touch her God given holy soul. That even if she perpetrated all of the sins in the Torah it would not influence, afflict, disfigure, injure, mar, harm, weaken or blemish her holy Jewish soul.

I explained to her by way of the example of an electric power plant that produces electrical power measured in megawatts (one million watts). A power plant with 10 megawatts of capacity produces 10MW of electricity at any given moment. The average family in Israel uses about 25-30 kilowatts in 24 hours.

I asked the young lady if there was anything that could go wrong with the electric circuits in her home to reduce the energy put out by the main plant? Not even one watt! It's like lowering the sea level by displacing a single drop of water. So, there is nothing you can do, even the worst of sins, that would reach the power plant of your soul.

She listened attentively without saying a word. I then produced a piece of paper and wrote in Ivrit a sentence taken from the daily morning prayers (Shacharit):

הָאָדָם כָּלֵב כָּלֵב כָּלֵב כָּלֵב כָּלֵב כָּלֵב-כָּלֵב

My Lord, the soul that you have given me is pure.

I told her to use this profound sentence as a mantra and repeat it often during the day.

After a while, her father called to say that she had returned to her former self, and thanked me; as if I had anything to do with the outcome.

Incident 2: Can a Kohen remove his Kohanic status?

A man came to me with an interesting request: that I remove his Kohanic status. He explained that he wanted to marry a woman whom a Kohen is prohibited from marrying.

I told the gentleman two things:

- 1) That there is no one in the world who can relieve you from the high pedestal of your Kahuna. Furthermore , Kahuna is in your DNA; to remove it is to turn you into thin air.
- 2) The laws of the Torah are not random decrees that the Creator decided to impose upon us. Indeed, we do not know the spiritual implications of any mitzva in the next world, but what we do know is that the mitzvot are the guidelines of how to have a happier and more quality life in this world. Your life with that woman would be a disaster for you both. If only for the experience we have in these matters, that after the initial period of marriage, the wife realizes that her new husband is weak of character, and then the feuding begins.

Purim's Message

Why am I writing the above now?

The two days of Purim (14th of Adar for Am Yisrael and the 15th for the residents of Yerushalayim) are celebrated as days of a great military victory over the Persians, when we "got up from the ropes" to defeat the overwhelming numbers of Persians who wanted to obey the decrees of their "beloved and wise" King to murder all the Jews in the 127 regions of his kingdom.

True! These were days of a great military miracle; however, their greater importance is as a time of widespread teshuva of

the many Jews who were assimilated into Persian society. The pending catastrophe which was intended to eradicate all the Jews under the rule of Achashverosh aroused the Jews to understand that their fate was sealed because they had turned their backs on the holy way of life that HaShem had commanded of them.

The situation in today's galuyot is not far different from the situation that existed in ancient Persia. Assimilation is rampant today. Chances are that the children in a family named Riley are Jewish because Mr. Riley married Shirley Goldstein from Miami, and the children in a family called Goldstein are goyim because Mr. Goldstein married Beverly Riley.

The two incidents at the beginning of this essay come to illustrate the difficulties the Jewish nation is facing.

1) There are many assimilated Jews who feel that their disconnect from Judaism is irreversible; that they have "murdered their Jewish souls" and will never be able to undo the irreparable spiritual damage that has been done. They are wrong! Once a Jew; always a Jew, no matter how far one strays there is always a path of return. Parents can dissolve their marriage by divorce because the husband-wife relationship, as emotionally strong as it is, is a judicial relationship, but not blood one. But a parent cannot divorce a child because the child's chromosomes are shared between abba and imma. HaShem Avinu Malkainu (our father and king) is always prepared to receive a Jew who wishes to return.

2) The initial departure of a Jew from under the proverbial "stretcher" (basic training in Tzahal's infantry units includes back-breaking forced marches carrying heavy stretchers; so the term used for one who shirks his obligation is to "escape from under the stretcher"), is to deny the relevance of the Torah and its mitzvot in our worldly existence. That Kohen who wanted to "shed his skin" without appreciating the fact that it is that very skin that is

keeping him alive, seeks his satisfaction in the thin ice of just above freezing waters.

Thus, it was with the assimilated Jews in Persia of Achashverosh and Haman and so it is today with the assimilated Jews in the “land of the stars and stripes”, and others .

Purim is the emancipation of the Jews from the black chains of ancient Persia, and it is our fervent hope that today, our “lost” brothers and sisters will see the light as well. (Megilkat Esther 8,16):

בְּרוּךְ הוּא הַמְבָרֵךְ בְּרוּךְ הוּא הַמְבָרֵךְ בְּרוּךְ הוּא הַמְבָרֵךְ

For the Jews there was light and gladness, joy and honor.

Have a meaningful and joyous Purim.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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