

Kippur.

C: COMMON ESSENCE: When asked what defines the common essence of all Jews? Some would answer that we are an extended family, descended from the same grandparents. Others suggest that we maintain a spiritually centered culture: living by 613 commandments, keeping dietary laws, marrying only within the nation and speaking a unique language with a unique alphabet.

While these are correct, there is a deeper quality.

SHORT INCIDENT: Several weeks after my holy brother, Rav Meir, was murdered in New York, in 1990, a stranger came to my home in the Old City. He introduced himself as a Baptist minister and claimed my brother was his rabbi; he requested that I continue the relationship.

I replied that I am a rabbi for the Jewish people, not for those who seek to divert our people from the truth to falsehood.

As we sat and spoke amicably over coffee, I waited for the inevitable antisemitic remark to appear. Eventually, it came: "Why do the Jews believe they were chosen by God over all other nations?"

I answered with a question: "Do you believe your status in the World to Come is a function of your behavior in this world?" He replied, "yes." I then said that the status of those born into this world is a function of how they behaved in the world from which they came. Those who were spiritually inclined were born with Jewish souls, the rest with gentile souls. He was visibly disturbed; he had never heard such a concept.

THE TWO TRACKS: Every Jew carries a holy, unique Jewish soul (Neshama). To be a Ben or Bat Yisrael (Son and daughter of Israel) is to live on two parallel tracks:

THE NATION: We are a people with a specific culture, land,

language, goal orientated future, and yes even a holy army, and bound by deep devotion to one another.

THE CONNECTION: We are linked to the Creator through the Mitzvot that HaShem commands and we obey.

These two tracks coalesce in the Holy Land of Eretz Yisrael.

Shabbat HaGadol, prior to the holiday of our freedom, reaffirms our identity as the Jewish nation. Shabbat Shuva reaffirms our identity as a God-centered people.

When Rabbi Shimon spoke of two Shabbatot, I suggest that he was referring specifically to these two Shabbatot. And that if we internalize the messages they proclaim, we will be immediately redeemed.

Part II: A Tale of One Family, Two Worlds

The West: A Seder in the Galut. An observant family in a great Torah center of the Diaspora – Flatbush, Lakewood, or South Florida. The home of Reb Sender and Mrs. Rayza is impeccable – the product of immense time, energy, and a significant outlay of money, all directed by the skillful and expeditious ba'alat habayit (woman of the house).

In the sitting room, the sofas and armchairs look inviting, though they remain shielded by thick plastic covers to ensure the upholstery retains its “brand new” luster. The centerpiece of the dining room is a five-meter-long Brazilian mahogany table, draped in the finest Irish linen. At its center stand imposing sterling silver candlesticks, heirlooms passed down through generations from mother to daughter. For this sacred night, the everyday china has been replaced by the finest Rosenthal china – each plate delicately rimmed with a band of gold; and the silverware has been put away in favor of gold-ware.

Resting on the table beneath a hand-embroidered silk cloth are the matzot. At the insistence of the two sons who are studying at the recently opened Yeshiva Taharas Ha'Torah in Las Vegas to bring the voice of Torah to the very gates of Gehennom. These matzot are from the first 18-minute batch. This guarantees that no stray bit of dough could have hidden in the rollers. These hand-made matzot were personally selected by the Rebbe of the shtiebel where the family now prays because the cost of membership in the local shul was getting out of control. He assured the boys that each piece was perfectly flat, bubble-free, and without any folded edges.

The wall-to-wall carpet is as lush as the grass in the garden outside. Above the table hangs the family's pride and joy: a multi-faceted crystal chandelier, hand-picked by Rayza during their last visit to Prague.

Reb Sender is resplendent in his new bekeshah – silk robe with swirls of blue cinched by a gold-buckled gartel. Rayza has just recited the Shehecheyanu blessing, dressed in a five-thousand-dollar gown imported from Paris. Their sons look handsome in their wide-brimmed black hats, and their two daughters, dressed in equally exquisite Parisian imports, look like brides-in-waiting.

The Seder is lively. They discuss the "Four Sons" over turkey and cranberry sauce. The Afikomen is "stolen" by the youngest daughter, who ransoms it for a vacation in Aruba. Finally, they reach the climax. They dance in a frenzy, singing: "L'shana Ha'ba'a Bi'Yerushalayim" – Next year in Jerusalem!

Suddenly, Mama collapses into a chair, crying. The singing stops. Father asks, "Why are you crying at the apex of this sacred night?"

Between sobs, she answers: "What do you mean 'Next year in Jerusalem'? The table, the chandelier, the carpet, the garden... how can we leave all this?"

Father takes her hand and dabs her tears. In a voice full of compassion, he says, "Darling, don't cry it's only a song!"

THE EAST: A Seder in Eretz Yisrael: Ten thousand kilometers to the east, in Eretz Yisrael, lives Reb Sender's brother, Kalman, and his wife Sarah. They had come on aliyah years ago with their five children, changing the family name to Yerushalmi. They were blessed with a beautiful family, an adequate apartment, and much nachat. However, their son Yossi would not be home for the Seder night; he was serving in the army within the Hesder yeshiva system.

The parents were not overly worried; Yossi had assured them he was in a safe place in the north and that they would all be together for the Seder next year.

At noon on the 14th of Nisan, Erev Pesach, Yossi and three fellow soldiers from his yeshiva were informed of their assignment for that evening. They were to cross into hostile territory in Southern Lebanon to man a "bunker" on Hill 432. Yossi knew the hill well. It was called a bunker only sarcastically; in reality, it was a foxhole just large enough for four soldiers. Their mission was to track terrorist movements and neutralize them on contact. The position was tolerable, except when it rained and the floor became a soggy, muddy mess. Yet today, the four hoped for rain. On the 14th of the Hebrew month, the full moon makes crossing into enemy territory a greater danger; rain and fog would be a protective blessing.

At 5:00 PM, they were issued their arms and ammunition. The Army Rabbinate also provided four plastic containers, each holding three matzot and the necessary ingredients for a Seder, along with four plastic bottles of wine and four Haggadot.

At 6:00 PM, they waited at the fence for the electricity to be cut so they could cross. Yossi held the map of the minefield.

“How strange,” he thought. “This is the ancestral land assigned to the tribe of Naftali, and we must enter it crawling on our stomachs.”

At 6:15 PM, the small aperture in the gate opened. As they had hoped, it began to rain, and a thick fog rolled in to shroud their movements. At that exact moment, ten thousand kilometers to the west, Yossi’s two cousins in New York were entering the mikvah to prepare for the sacred night.

The four soldiers reached Hill 432 after a two-kilometer trek at double-time. They removed the camouflage, settled into the hole, and pulled the grassy cover back over them. Each was assigned a direction to watch. Silence was absolute; if an enemy were sighted, a light tap on the shoulder would alert the others. After settling in, they prayed Ma’ariv and began their Seder. It was completed within half an hour; they were relieved that the four cups of wine had no negative effect on their alertness.

At 6:00 PM in New York, Reb Sender’s family returned from shul to begin their opulent Seder. By 11:00 PM, they were dancing around their mahogany table, singing of their hope to be in Jerusalem.

In Eretz Yisrael, it was then 1:00 AM. The four soldiers were waging a heroic battle against boredom and sleep. The minutes crawled. Just before the first light of dawn, they exited the outpost and navigated back through the minefield and the electric fence. After reporting to their officer, the four collapsed onto their cots in their tent, not even pausing to remove their boots. In an hour, they would have to rise again for the Shacharit service.

That night, the guardian angels of Yossi and his friends were draped in flowing golden robes, sharing the Heavenly Seder with the righteous of all generations.

May we all realize that we are living in monumental times that

will decide the fate of nations and continents. But for Yossi, his fellow soldiers and for the entire Jewish nation, we are now living in Biblical times. These days are ushering in the Messianic era and all that it promises for us and for all of humanity.

Shabbat Shalom.

Pesach Kasher V'samayach.

Nachman Kahana

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