

BS"D Parashat Vayechi 5783

Recovery & Hope

This is being written on the tenth of Tevet, the day dedicated to recalling the beginning of the Babylonian siege of Yerushalayim, eventually leading to the destruction of the first holy Temple.

In addition, the Chief Rabbinate of the Medina declared this day as "General Kaddish Day" for the descendants of the holocaust victims to recite Kaddish over those whose day of death is unknown.

Every passing day brings us closer to when the murderers and torturers, and their victims, will have passed on. It is incumbent upon us to remember and not forget all the details of the Shoah, because to remember Amalek is a Torah mitzva.

I have mixed emotions regarding visiting the extermination places in Poland and elsewhere. On the one-hand I don't want to tread on this earthly presence of Gehennom. On the other hand, since I was brought up in an atmosphere of Torah, of love and compassion at home and at the yeshivot I attended, I have an under-developed sense of hatred.

King Shlomo states in Kohelet (3,8):

וְעַתָּה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לְעֵת הַזֶּה אָמַר אֱלֹהִים לְעֵת הַזֶּה

A time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

A visit to any of the places where an Aisavic descendant treads would contribute greatly to my tikun to hate. But I will probably forgo this “dubious” experience and spend the rest of my days concentrating on “Love thy brother as thy self,” and leave “a time for hate” to another “thoughtful Jew”.

The Tenth of Tevet

Back to the day of fasting commemorating the beginning of the siege of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, of the Holy City which ended with the destruction of the First Temple...

The people of Israel met and fought many enemies, all of them cruel, ruthless, and thirsty for Jewish blood. We emerged from the wars with ugly scars, but we remember Yehoshua bin Nun, King David, the period of the Judges, Passover, Purim, Hanukkah, Independence Day, Yom Kippur and more.

The Holocaust, who won? The people of Israel who managed to survive the German killing machine (even though today we number about thirteen million Jews in the world, millions less than our number of 18 million at the outbreak of the war), or were the Germans who killed six to seven million Jews victorious? Strange question, but definitely a legitimate one!

To arrive at an answer, it is necessary to determine what were the goals of the Germans – the descendants of Esau, the brother of Ya’akov?

There were two goals – one immediate and the other more distant. The immediate goal was the physical annihilation of European Jewry, followed by the extermination of all the Jews. With the larger goal in mind, of the extermination of Judaism! No longer a God who demands justice, kindness, and mercy. That “good” should overcome evil, the love of fellow man who was

created in the image of God, that is to say the capacity to distinguish between good and evil, the seven Noachide mitzvot and the 613 mitzvot for the people of Israel.

The measure of victory or defeat is the degree that Judaism exists in the world. Those who are angry at the Creator and abandon the observance of Shabbat, kashrut and all the other requirements that make up Judaism, because he cannot understand the holocaust, represent a degree of victory for the Nazis of all shades, as opposed to those who adhere to Judaism, who raise the banner of historic sanctified Halachic Judaism.

The various anti-Semitic groups the world over are in essence present day Nazis and all are either financially supported by the Christians or encouraged by them. These haters of Jews and HaShem will not stop as long as there is one loyal, strong and dedicated Jew who continues to live under the holy umbrella every day here in the Holy Land.

National Recovery – The Future

Looking back, it is difficult to grasp what the situation was with our people at the end of World War II.

In 1939, the nation of Israel numbered about 17 million men, women, and children, and after 6 brutal years of war and murder, only 11 million Jews remained in the world.

The general feeling of our people was depression and defeat. We looked up at the sky with a heart-wrenching question, 'Where was our father in heaven?' and the answer we received was 'Where were human beings?'

We found ourselves with six hundred thousand refugees in the largest cemetery in the world called 'Europe'.

Thousands of Jews were murdered after the war when they returned to their former places of residence. The British locked the country's gates to the refugees and the United States agreed to accept only a few.

The people of Israel were sick and devoid of all hope. The feeling was that our decline as a people was only a matter of time because who thought of getting married and having children?

In addition to our situation in Europe, hundreds of thousands of our brothers suffered difficult lives in Moslem countries.

We were on the brink of national insanity.

Then, three years after the war – the blink of an eye in historical terms – HaShem brought about the establishment of the State of Israel. The first law that was passed by the new State was the Law of Return whereby the State opened its doors to all Jews – to the sick and broken in body and spirit.

Over time, the refugees found a new life and a will to live.

People who lost their entire families and believed they would never be able to love again, started families and had children. The smiles that hadn't been seen for years returned to faces that had seen the Angel of Death.

The State of Israel gave its citizens not only a sense of security but also the feeling that our God has the power to avenge a small part of the evil done to our people, such as the execution of the tyrant Eichmann who was tried before a court in Jerusalem and hanged by a Jew who that morning had worn tefillin.

These things were presented to the survivors by the Jewish state:

1- Recovery and hope.

2- Descendants and continuation.

3- Protection of the Jewish people, and punishment of our enemies.

In parashat Chayai Sarah, it is told how Abraham our father realized that his guests were not ordinary passersby who regularly visited his home, but angels of HaShem, each one sent to carry out a particular mission.

One was sent to heal Abraham and save Lot.

The second was sent to inform Abraham and Sarah about the future birth of Yitzchak.

And the third was to overturn the five evil cities in the Jordan Valley.

These three roles are the same as those that faced the State of Israel after the Holocaust.

Many of the survivors vowed that they would never put themselves in the fragile position of loving and losing. And the State united their broken hearts and restored to them the desire to live and to love themselves and others.

Like Abraham and Sarah, the remnant of the Holocaust was close to despair of establishing a continuation of the people of Israel, and the State provided them with the will and ability to continue their existence.

And as far as punishing the haters of Israel is concerned, we should ask our holy soldiers who sacrifice so much to defend the people of Israel after two thousand years of inability to defend ourselves.

My message to our brothers and sisters abroad, to the people of Torah there, to the yeshiva leaders and the rabbis of the communities, to the directors of Jewish schools and the heads of organizations: What would you give to be present at that

time in Avraham's tent together with the ministering angels? To participate in the alleviation of the pain, to hear the promise of the continuation of the people of Israel, and to take revenge on the haters of our people?

After all, these things are present in our everyday lives in Medinat Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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