

Emor 5779

BS"D Parashat Emor 5779

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

The Parsha and Current Events: NEDER (VOW) FULFILLED

The seventh chapter of tractate Yoma describes the very complex, detailed, physically exhaustive and even life-threatening responsibilities of the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) on Yom Kippur. Exhaustive because he is required to slaughter various animals throughout the day, which for him begins before sun-up and ends only at sundown; including bringing up the body parts to the 4.5 meter high altar. And life-threatening because he enters the Holy of Holies four times during the day, where a mistake could cost him his life.

This is just a short list of the tasks which the Kohen Gadol, who at this stage in his life is no longer a young man, and who has not slept the previous night nor taken a morsel of food or a drop of water since before the previous sundown, must take upon himself..

The Mishna in Yoma sums it up in a most restrained manner, saying:

וְהָיוּ מְבָרְכִים אֶת הַקֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל בְּעֵת הַיְּהוּדָה וְהָיוּ מְבָרְכִים אֶת הַקֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל בְּעֵת הַיְּהוּדָה
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At the conclusion of his labors they would bring his personal clothing and accompany him to his home. And the Kohen Gadol would make a festive meal for his family and friends – at the

occasion of his exiting in peace from the Holy of Holies.

Our son Mordechai just completed 28 years of intense army service, attaining the rank of brigadier general. As an infantry officer he served in the most dangerous battles on our borders and beyond. He commanded Israel's most elite units and engaged in many combat missions of which he cannot speak (and probably will never be allowed to).

Towards the end of his military career, he voiced his personal feelings regarding retirement, by quoting the phrase used in the above Mishna: "at the occasion of exiting in peace from the holy of holies", with the IDF serving as the Holy of Holies of our nation in the absence of the Bet Hamikdash. Because just as the Bet Hamikdash protected Am Yisrael by cleansing us of our sins; today the protector of Am Yisrael as the messenger of HaShem is the holy army of Medinat Yisrael. He said: "Now that HaShem has granted me the gift of leaving the "Holy of Holies" whole in body, soul and mind, I will donate a Sefer Torah to a worthy place".

Yesterday on day 15 of the Omer, the last day of the month of Nissan, Mordechai fulfilled his neder (vow) by donating a Sefer Torah to the Regavim Yeshiva High School in the kibbutz Tirat Tzvi, located in the Jordan valley.

It was a memorable occasion to say the least.

It was attended by the family, the staff and students of the yeshiva and members of the kibbutz. The Torah was brought out and the sheer energy of the young men of the yeshiva could ignite all the homes of the kibbutz and its neighbors! I stood in great awe. The Torah is our book of laws. But every civilized nation today has a written code of laws. However, I never saw or heard that young people of any land, except ours, hold up their law books while dancing, while embracing the book of their laws.

During the ceremony I pointed out the similarity in principle of giving a Sefer Torah and the establishment of our holy Medina. Today we brought a holy Sefer Torah into the holy ark of the bet kneset, and on Thursday we shall celebrate 71 years when HaShem brought his holy people into his holy land of Israel.

WHY JEWISH SOLDIERS DIE

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

Indeed, there are over 23,741 of Tzahal who are at rest in military cemeteries scattered throughout the land, and the question remains: what went wrong when not one of them deserved to die?

It is not me who is asking this question before HaShem. Many have asked, the first of whom was Yehoshua Bin Nun.

The Book of Yehoshua 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 Ai. Yehoshua's generals suggested that instead of sending the entire Jewish army to capture the town, it would suffice to send 3000 soldiers. The 3000 were defeated, with the dire result that one Jewish warrior named Yair Ben Menashe was killed. He was equal in Torah knowledge to half the Sanhedrin of 71 judges!

Yehoshua was devastated! How could it happen that a Jewish soldier was killed while taking part 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 had sinned", the implication being that the community of Israel had caused the

catastrophe of a Jewish soldier being killed in battle.

Yehoshua investigated the matter and disclosed that one man, Achan Ben Karmi, had stolen some items from the Yericho booty that had been sanctified for the Mishkan. Achan was put to death by HaShem's command.

As it turned out, HaShem's declaration to Yehoshua that "Israel had sinned" was in fact the sin of only one man, Achan Ben Karmi of the tribe of Yehuda – that brought down the righteous Yair of the tribe of 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 Almighty's accounting principle that an "innocent" man pays the ultimate price for another man's sin is 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.

The severity of Achan's act and death penalty can be more readily understood.

The Jewish nation's 40-year successful sojourn in the hostile desert environment of the Sinai was no secret. The Midrash states that there was even commercial and theological contact between the millions of Jews and other nations.

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

However, after 40 years of wandering in the desert and on their way to cross the Jordan River, Moshe Rabbeinu and the Jewish army totally annihilated these two buffer states. At this point, any gentile in the Holy Land with some degree of

self-preservation left the land or prepared to do so knowing that no one could stand before the “steamroller” of God’s chosen people.

Yehoshua entered and destroyed Yericho. By then, it is probable that half the gentile population had already left Eretz Yisrael. Then came the double disaster at Ai caused by the sin of Achan. A Jewish soldier was killed, and the remaining gentiles concluded that it was possible to defeat the Jews in battle, so why leave? And so, they unpacked and remained.

Despite the fact that Yehoshua conquered the land, the gentiles who remained influenced many of the Jewish nation to adopt their idolatrous ways, which eventually led to the destruction of the First Bet HaMikdash.

The result of Achav’s heinous sin was to empower and encourage the gentiles to deny HaShem’s gift of the Holy Land to the Jewish people, and therefore they remained 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 (evil inclination), as stated by Shlomo HaMelech (Kohelet chap. 7)

There is not a tzaddik (holy person) in the world who does only 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, HaShem has opened the gates to Eretz Yisrael. Yet, so many observant Jews, including prominent rabbis, choose not to come home. The message to the gentiles in Eretz Yisrael and around the world is that HaShem

did not give us Eretz Yisrael, because if He did, why then are these rabbis not in Eretz Yisrael?

Their dire sin, equal in its political and historical consequences to what Achan Ben Karmi did, has led to similar tragic results.

I wish to conclude with an incident involving the great gaon Harav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt'l. A student in the yeshiva requested his 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 Herzl, where there are hundreds of the nation's greatest tzaddikim!"

Yom Ha'atzma'ut samayach and Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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