

Ha'a'zinu and Erev Yom Kippur 5776

BS"D Parashat Ha'a'zinu and Erev Yom Kippur 5776

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A Jew Can Never Cease Being a Jew

The Tanach in Melachim 1 chapter 20 relates a very telling incident in the life of Achav, King of the ten northern tribes of Israel.

Achav, to be sure, was far from a tzadik. He, Yeravam ben Nevat and Menashe were the three kings who, according to the Mishna in Sanhedrin, lost their inherent places in Gan Eden.

Ben Hadad King of Aram (today's Syria), threatened Achav with war if he did not deliver to him his gold and silver, his wives and children. Achav was forced to capitulate and sent to Ben Hadad all that he demanded.

The following day, Ben Hadad sent another demand to Achav. This time Achav was to deliver to him "machmad ay'necha" – that which is the most precious in your eyes. Achav and all his ministers rejected the demand and agreed unanimously to go to war.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 102b) asks, that after relinquishing his gold, silver, wives and children, what was left that could be described as the "most precious thing" in Achav's eyes? And

surprisingly, the Gemara answers “a Sefer Torah”.

Why would Achav who totally rejected the Torah, choose to go to war over a Torah scroll?

I believe that despite Achav’s rejection of its spiritual message, the Torah in Achav’s eyes was the universally recognized symbol of the Jewish nation. For him to relinquish the royal Torah scroll to an enemy was tantamount to eliminating the national soul that bound all Jews together. Achav was prepared to die in battle rather than to commit an act of betrayal against the nation and against his own personal “Jewishness”.

This incident defines Achav’s inner character and thoughts. Despite his glaring faults and weaknesses, he can serve as the leading teacher in two areas:

1- There is an immutable connection between every individual Jew to the collective Am Yisrael, even one who is so far from Torah observance.

We learn from Achav that the skeletal-infrastructure of every Jew is the undeniable fact that the Creator brought his unique soul to this world when born to a Jewish mother, or converts who were born with a Jewish soul and for some unknown reason had to be born to a seemingly gentile mother. It is for this reason that, halachically a Jew can never cease being a Jew no matter what he does, because one cannot erase his essence.

2- We learn from Achav the great pride there is in being a Jew. He relinquished everything of value – family and wealth – but was willing to die before infringing on his and on his nation’s Jewishness.

A Third Type of Tshuva

The Rambam in his laws of Tshuva discusses two motives for one's decision to do Tshuva – love of HaShem or fear of divine retribution.

I would like to submit a third motive, one which is unfortunately grossly lacking in the education of Jews in the galut and in some non-observant schools in Israel.

It is tshuva not purely out of love for HaShem – which is in the realm of a few learned and highly spiritually developed individuals.

It is not tshuva out of fear of punishment – which is a product of an egotistical mind that is not even close to the spiritual ideal of a “Priestly kingdom and a sanctified nation”.

This third tshuva is out of pride in being a member of the small, elite group of people who the Creator appointed to be His chosen nation. Pride in being the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov. A descendant of the people who crossed the Red Sea and saw HaShem's miracle, and stood at the foot of Mount Sinai while receiving the Torah from the Creator Himself.

Children of a nation 3500 years old whose blessings to humanity have no equal.

It is the pride of being a Jew that echoes in one's soul proclaiming:

I am a prince, a son of HaShem. How can I betray the love and confidence HaShem has lavished upon me, by committing a sin?

How can I betray the 150 generations of my family beginning

Jewish Pride

When I still lived in the galut and had not yet made Aliyah, I recall every time I would recite the morning blessing about HaShem not making me a gentile, it would come to my mind that He did not have to make us gentiles. He left it to us to do the job.

We spoke their language and were steeped in their culture. Life was centered around sports, with the great sportsmen our heroes and not the heroes of Jewish history. Entertainment, food, vacations, career – I and my fellow yeshiva students were very much a part of the gentile scene in whose land (unknown then to us) we were considered as non-Christian, unwanted guests, while we felt that we were home.

We were devoid of any Jewish pride!

There were many moments in my life when I felt proud, but the one which has left the greatest impression was at the IDF induction center, when I saw myself in the mirror dressed in the uniform of Tzahal.

I was now a true son of Eretz Yisrael, prepared to even give my life in the defense of the Jewish people, who with the compassion of HaShem have returned home.

Gmar Chatima Tova

& Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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