

Ki Taytzai 5775

BS"D Parashat Ki Taytzai 5775

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Do You Love Being a Jew?

Starting with the month of Elul until after Shmini Atzeret our lives are centered around tshuva. Repentance for one's sins is basic to our relationship with the Creator. A better way is when one conducts his life by preventing the performance of a sin in the first place.

Rabbi Akavya ben Mehalalel in Pirkei Avot chapter 3 lays down a formula for sin prevention intended to dispel the negative compulsions stemming from one's ego:

חשבונות יום אדם יושבין לפניו , חשבונות יום אדם יושבין לפניו , חשבונות יום אדם יושבין לפניו , חשבונות יום אדם יושבין לפניו , חשבונות יום אדם יושבין לפניו : חשבונות

Consider your lowly biological origins, consider where you will be eventually laid to rest, and consider before Whom you will have to present “a reckoning and an accounting” of your life – before the King of Kings, the Holy One Blessed be He.

What is the difference between a “**reckoning**” and an “**accounting**”, which the great rabbi said is in store for every one of us?

I submit that the “**reckoning**” is the minute-by-minute playback of each one's life – all our thoughts and deeds.

The “**accounting**” is a different quantum level of interaction

between the soul and its Creator. Here the King of Kings closes the big book of your biography and says: "Now let's talk tachlis! Did you love being a Jew?"

HaShem will ask if we were proud to be a part of the select few chosen by the Creator to be His own. He will ask if we were proud to be in the workplace and in the street with a kippa and tzitzit. He will ask a married woman if she was proud to cover her hair without sneaking out a few hairs – here and there.

To love Hashem is the real story that is behind the Akaida of Yitzchak episode. The call to sacrifice YITZCHAK was directed to Avraham and not to Yitzchak. So, in fact, Yitzchak had the prerogative to refuse. Had he done so, Avraham would have been exempted from his obligation due to causes beyond his control; and Yitzchak could not have been held liable, because he was not commanded.

Yet, Yitzchak agreed to be the sacrifice demanded by HaShem for one reason, he knew that it was HaShem's will that he be sacrificed on the altar on what was to become the Temple Mount in Yerushalayim.

Yitzchak's love of HaShem drove him to do what he knew was HaShem's will, despite the fact that he was not commanded.

I recall the testimony of a survivor of Treblinka in the Yerushalayim trial of the mass murderer Ivan Demjanjuk. Although he was physically sitting on the witness chair, his thoughts were still in Treblinka. He kept repeating, Shabbos, Yom Tov, Paisach. He was again in the lowest hell of gentile inhumanity longing for the beauty of Yiddishkeit – he spoke as one who longs for a long-lost love.

He loved being a Jew even at the enormous price he had to pay.

One of my Roshei Yeshiva passed away. During the hespedim, his son-in-law related that his father-in-law had been sent to

Siberia right after his wedding at the age of nineteen. When he returned five years later, he told the yeshiva bocherim that he never knew how much he loved Torah and Yiddishkeit until it had been taken from him in the camps of Siberia.

Avraham Aveinu at the Brit Bain HaBetarim, was informed by HaShem of the cost he and his descendants would have to pay in order to be partners with the Creator as His chosen people. This price would be exacted in the form of destructions and exiles, pogroms, blood libels, the Shoah and more. Avraham accepted all the difficulties in order for him and his descendants to be close to HaShem in this world and the next – just as a person very much in love must at times sacrifice in order to be with his beloved.

At the end of the day, it comes down to one simple question: “Do you love being a Jew?”

I have never met two people in love who did not want to be together all the time. The Jews in the galut, regardless of their levels of spirituality, are not in love with being Jewish.

For some it is a fact of life, and they abide by the Torah for all sorts of reasons. Many even view their Judaism as an oppressive yoke that they cannot get rid of.

If you love HaShem and love being Jewish, you live in the Promised Land of HaShem. Many “talk the talk” but only a tiny minority “walk the walk”. Eretz Yisrael is the big divide between the “boys” and the “men” when it comes to profound, sincere, inner spirituality.

David Hamelech repeats the word “**Ahavti**” (I love) 12 times in Tehilim. He expressed his love for HaShem, for Torah and mitzvot, and for Yerushalayim.

However, HaShem the Creator of all and certainly of the holy language of Ivrit called love AHAVA. The root (shoresh) of

AHAVA is HAV meaning to give.

True AHAVA cannot remain in the realm of emotions. It seeks avenues of expression, foremost of which is to give to the object of one's love. The object could be the love of two people, parents to children, and even the love of a person towards an ideology. In all cases, love that remains an emotion will not endure without real acts of giving.

The concept that HaShem loves the Jewish people is repeated often in the liturgy. HaShem expressed His love by giving us the sacred land of Eretz Yisrael and He blessed those who live here.

No one has said it better than the prophet Yishayahu in this week's haftara:

"Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.

See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you.

Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn.

Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you;

your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the hip.

Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy."

Shabbat Shalom,

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