

BS"D Parashat Ki Tisa 5782

Mitzvot, Danger & Fear

Two Stories:

One

"A" spoke lashon hara regarding "B". He then felt remorse for what he did and decided to do the right thing; to admit his guilt. On Shabbat, "A" stood up before the congregation and admitted that he had spoken lashon hara regarding "B" and took a public neder (vow) never again to speak lashon hara. From that moment on, the "talk of the town" of the 500 people who heard his admission was one thing – finding out what "A" said about "B". "A" intended to do the mitzva of tshuva, but what evolved from his sincere intentions was disastrous for him and for the entire community.

Two

Several towns were located within a very large forest, and in town "A" lived a great talmid chacham who spent his days and nights learning Torah. However, there was problem with town "A". All the robberies within the forest occurred only there! The police were at their wits end to discover why. Eventually they apprehended the thieves, who in questioning disclosed that at night the entire forest was pitch dark, except for town "A" from which one light shone every night. So, they were drawn to that town. The police investigated and discovered that the light was from the house of the rabbi who was learning the holy Torah from dusk to dawn.

Both stories represent an identical theme. Every day we pray to HaShem to distance us from evil people, from the yetzer

hara (evil inclination) and from bad thoughts, etc., however, we don't consider the possibility that despite our good intentions, our mitzvot could cause others to sin. We have to pray for the gift that the mitzvot that we perform should be pure, without blemish and accepted by the heavenly court.

I will return to this be"ch.

Ukraine

Ukraine, probably the country with the worst track record of antisemitism in the world's most anti-Semitic continent – Europe – is threatened by invasion. The Russian army has closed in from three sides and is apparently preparing to invade. But bear in mind that the Russians themselves are not far behind the Ukrainians in Judenhass; so, if it happens, it will be a case of the bad punishing the evil. Hence there is no justification for us to pity either side.

The Ukrainians were willing partners of the Germans. Many of the guards at the infamous extermination camps were Ukrainians.

A short survey of the Jewish blood that was shed in the 20th century alone by the Ukrainians:

In February 1905, a pogrom took place in Feodosia; on April 19 of the same year a pogrom occurred in Melitopol and in May in Zhytomyr. In Odessa, 300 Jews were murdered, and thousands injured. Other serious pogroms occurred in Ekaterinoslav, Kiev, Simferopol, Romny, Kremenchug, Nikolaev, Chernigov, Kamenets-Podolsky and Elisavetgrad, and in 626 villages.

In November 1917, the Imperial Russian Army initiated a Ukrainian pogrom in Uman.

In February 1919, 1500 Jews were murdered in Proskurov. In

Tetiev on March 25, 1919, Cossack troops murdered 4000 Jews.

During the Russian Civil War, between 1918 and 1921 a total of 1,236 violent incidents against Jews occurred in 524 towns in Ukraine. The estimates of the number of killed range between 30,000 and 60,000. Of the recorded 1,236 pogroms and excesses, 493 were carried out by Ukrainian People's Republic soldiers under command of Symon Petliura.

All this and more are in addition to the notorious 1648 pogroms which the Cossacks carried out. During the 1648 uprising of the Cossacks and Serfs led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky (or the "Hamil of Evil" as he was called by the Jews) against the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth. Massacre of the Jews of Poland, Belarus, and today's Ukraine occurred throughout the rebellion, which lasted for many years.

Thousands were slaughtered or died of starvation and epidemics, and many others fled, sold into slavery, or converted. The number of Jews killed by the Cossack rebels in 1648 was estimated at a few thousand to 20,000. It is estimated that all the parties – the Cossacks, the Russians, the Swedes, their allies, and the Poles themselves who massacred them killed between 40,000 and 50,000 Jews in total.

Back to our time. Many countries are calling their nationals to leave the Ukraine, because once the Russian bear is let loose little will be left.

Based on my premise, which has never disappointed me, that whatever happens in the world has direct or indirect bearing on the Jewish nation; and it's for our rabbis to decipher the pertinent message in the context of the particular time in history. There are many things we can conclude from this reality. One is that we are prone to forget uncomfortable incidents in our history; however, HaShem never forgets. His memory slate is non-erasable, even though it could take some time for a reaction to occur.

There is Danger and Fear in the Air

Not only in the Ukraine but in Los Angeles, South Bend, Atlanta, Houston, Skokie, Brooklyn, Hollywood, and Boca Raton, and even in Ferndale and Kiryat Joel, New York. The statistics are frightening. The incidents of antisemitism increase yearly, exponentially. And as the economy and inflation rise, so too are the calls to blame the wealthy Jews, with slogans to sermons, marches to demonstrations, beatings to torching, to writing JUDE on stores owned by Jews.

So why are the Jews not leaving the US? I am not referring to the reform and unaffiliated who behave like goyim; but to observant Jews who know a chapter or two of Jewish history; and even to the religious Zionists who feel snug in their cocoons, fearing to peek out lest they see reality.

Who is to blame for their indifference and apathetic attitudes as to what is occurring in the land of “milk and money”?

I submit for the 100th time that the blame rests on the well-intended observant rabbis of the respective communities.

I believe that most of the rabbis, teachers, and communal leaders of the Orthodox communities are well intentioned. They enter the rabbinate with the goal of strengthening Judaism. But there is a pitfall.

As I wrote above, we have to pray to HaShem that the mitzvot we perform shall be pure, without blemish and accepted by the heavenly court, and not pitfalls for other Jews.

The community asks, “why should we leave for Eretz Yisrael when our beloved and worthy rabbi does not do so or even encourage us to do so”? And the rabbi asks, “how can I leave my community in the hands of someone less dedicated than I”?

It's the proverbial dog chasing his tail, where each energizes the other with the final result being "staying put", even when the signs all point to an imminent invasion of hate in many US Communities, like the invasion of Russia into Ukraine.

So let us pray to HaShem that we not be tempted by the yetzer hara to sin, but equally, that our good intentions should not cause others to sin.

May HaShem enlighten the eyes of Jewish leaders the world over to the new realities in our lives. The galut is finished. On the 5th of Iyar 5708 the moment Ben Gurion announced to the world that the State of Israel has been established, in the heavens rang out a call from HaShem to begin abolishing the exile of His people that began 2000 years ago.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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