

Pekudai 5776

BS"D Parashat Pekudai 5776

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

How do you measure up?

Our parsha summarizes the material, artifacts, individuals and efforts which were involved in constructing the Mishkan.

Gold was donated – 29 talents and 730 shekels (3000 shekels to a sanctified talent), that is one half shekel from the 603,550 males between the ages of 20 and 60. Silver – 100 talents and 1775 shekels. Bronze – 70 talents and 2400 shekels.

The length of blue, purple and red wool and white flax textiles is not recorded in the parsha, but it was substantial.

Weights, measures and calculations play a significant part in the substance aspect of our lives (i.e. finance, in the laboratory, navigation etc.); but calculations also play a most significant part in our spiritual lives. Every one of us will eventually be called to disclose what we did or did not perform in our lifetimes. However, before disclosing the ultimate spread sheet, every Jew must review daily the balance sheets of one's own life.

There are four methods to analyze our spiritual level while we are still in this transient world.

1- Every Jew should ask himself if, 100 years ago in 1916, all Jews in the world were on the exact spiritual level that I am on now, would there be Jews in the world today? If my level of Torah understanding and dedication to the fulfillment of

mitzvot was the universal Jewish norm in 1916, would there be today any identifiably conscious Jews, or would the spiritual force at that time be inadequate to propel the Jewish nation into the next century?

This is not just an intellectual exercise in musar, because the question is unfolding this very day even in Eretz Yisrael.

The Reform and Conservative movements – after having “successfully” completed their “scorched earth” crusade of destroying holy Jewish souls in the United States through the Shoah of intermarriage – are now attempting to repeat their “successes” in the Holy Land. These two breakaway destructive movements are attempting to infiltrate into the religious life here in a manner similar to an HIV virus that infiltrates into the nucleus of a healthy cell and then takes control of the cell from within.

They use the Israeli High Court as their instrument of infiltration by waving the sword of democracy and equality to undo the fundamental basis of Torah observance. The High Court acquiesces to the avoda zara of Democracy uber alles and chips away at the foundations of 3500 years of Judaism. They are supported by irresponsible elements in the government who are interested in putting their hands on the US checkbooks of these break-away elements.

These destructive reform and conservative elements have received an area of the Western Wall to perform their circuses replete with clowns and jesters where the female “rabbi” dons tefillin but not the male “rabbi”.

It is only a question of time when they will disavow brit mila and halachic marriage here. If we permit this to go on, they will bring into our society the mamzerim and other halachic problems that abound in the galut.

If I would be given the opportunity to argue the case for denying these movements any religious foothold here, I would

say the following to the traditional and secular elements in our society: We who fervently abide by the Torah will be affected only marginally. However, if you project where your children and children's children will be in 100 years from now, you will find that they have intermarried with gentiles and most certainly will not be living here in Israel.

The reform and conservatives are designated as "movements," which implies a forward thrust into the future. However, their thrust is to the past – to the time of Terach the father of Avraham who was an idolater.

2- Each one of us should also ask ourselves how we can know if HaShem loves us and where we stand in the eyes of HaShem.

The illustrious Rabbainu Tam, of the Tosefot school of rabbis, laid down a principle that answers this question: If one has the opportunity to fulfill uncommon mitzvot, it is a sign that HaShem loves him.

For American Jews, the most uncommon mitzva is to uproot oneself from the galut and come home.

For the Jews in Eretz Yisrael, it is the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way to the destiny of the Jewish people – studying Torah on a high level without financial difficulties, serving in Tzahal, or working in any of the many dimensions of our life here as a policeman, a bus driver who safely brings his passengers to their destinations. or a housewife who manages her family to the fullest.

One might ask if these are rare mitzvot – learning Torah, serving as a soldier, a bus driver, or a housewife. Indeed!?

Yes, these are all very rare mitzvot, because they are being performed in Eretz Yisrael, after Am Yisrael has navigated through 2000 years of galut to come home. This is the rarest

and most unprecedented of human experiences.

If you live in Eretz Yisrael, it is an indisputable message that the Almighty loves you.

3- The third question in the investigation of one's spiritual level is about an important principle in religious observance which applies to us all: I cannot attain Gan Eden while creating Gehennom for another Jew.

Examples abound. I pray in a bet kneset in a loud voice to make sure that HaShem is listening, while disturbing the concentration of others; or I am ill and yet demand to pray in a minyan, while spreading my germs to fellow daveners. A rabbi teaches or preaches with the intent that his good deeds will stand by him in the heavens, but causes his students to leave his class more perplexed than when they arrived because he failed to prepare his lessons properly; or the ultimate sin of teaching Torah while depriving the students of their God-given inheritance by not informing them that Eretz Yisrael is waiting for them to take possession of their legitimate wealth.

4- Another test regards the statement in the Torah to אָהַבְתָּ אֶת-עַמְּךָ כָּמוֹ אָהַבְתָּ אֶת-עַדְיָתְךָ – love your fellow man as you love yourself.

One can understand this mitzva in its plainest intent – to love others as you love yourself. However, it can also be understood to be a test of one's sincerity when read as a question. Would you want to be close to a person who is exactly like you (kamocho) in honesty, integrity and sincerity? If the answer is yes, then you have passed your test of moral conduct. If you are hesitant about being this man's close friend, then you have to make some profound changes in your life.

There is one more important test that has to do with the genuineness of your spiritual leader.

When in his presence, do you feel a deep compulsion to become a better Jew – not out of anything he might have said, but because of his very being? If yes, then you are standing in the presence of a holy man. If your rabbi does not do that to you, find another spiritual leader.

There are many important issues on our Jewish national “plate” at this time. But since the religious and moral levels of our holy nation in the eyes of HaShem depend on the behavior of every individual Jew, it is essential for each of us to perform according to the letter and spirit of what HaShem expects from us as His chosen people.

And although no nation could have done better than we in the 3500 years of Yiddishkeit, we can still do better than what we are doing today.

Shabbat Shalom and Chodesh Tov,

Nachman Kahana

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