

# Shlach 5776

BS"D Parashat Shlach 5776

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

## Are you a Jew or Jewish?

A short anecdote to introduce this week's message.

Several days ago, I chanced upon a group of Americans enjoying the Old City's atmosphere.

As is my habit, I asked them from where they came, and they replied that they were from Texas. "Then we have something in common," I said. "We both have a single star on our flags."

They were impressed that an Israeli knew of the 'Lone Star State'. Then a woman asked me if I was Jewish?

I replied that I am not Jewish. There was a bewildered look on my newfound friends, so I began to explain. A color which is not really red but tends to be so is described as reddish, and if it tends to be brown it is described as brownish. I am a total, absolute Jew – I am not Jewish.

I am not totally convinced that all of them understood what I said.

### What is Absolute Tshuva?

Rambam in his "Laws of Tshuva" chapter 1, explains that there are two levels of Tshuva – basic and absolute.

The basic level comprises three stages: Vidui (confession),

Charata (truthful regret) and Kabala al ha'atid (resolution not to repeat the transgression).

Confession is the initial factor in Tshuva, where the sinner bows his head in shame before the reality that he himself created.

Truthful regret is where one does not lie to the Creator by saying how disgusting the sinning experience was. He admits that at the time it was pleasurable, but he regrets evoking HaShem's anger.

It concludes with a sincere resolution not to repeat the sin.

In chapter 2, Rambam discusses Tshuva of another quantum level – Absolute Tshuva.

This refers to a situation where the sinner finds himself in a similar set of circumstances, but this time he refrains from transgressing for the expressed goal of repenting.

Rambam illustrates this with a graphic example of a man and woman who sinned and now find themselves in a similar set of romantic circumstances. Despite the fact that nothing has changed between them, they consciously draw away from each other with the intent to do Tshuva.

While studying this chapter of the Rambam, I was disturbed by a “minor” technicality with his illustration of Absolute Tshuva. Is the great Rabbi suggesting that such a couple may plan an encounter in intimate circumstances for the purpose of Tshuva? Certainly not!

May a shrimp-eater order a heaping plate of shrimp salad in a treif restaurant, sit down with knife and fork in hand just in order to walk out of the restaurant? Certainly not!

So it appears that, according to the Rambam, Absolute Tshuva can only be initiated by HaShem for the sake of those whom He wishes to attain absolute atonement.

## **Leadership vs. mob rule**

Our parsha relates the demeaning episode in the history of the Jewish nation when they rejected one of the two pillars in their relationship with HaShem. Just as the Earth has a “true” north and a magnetic north – where one does not exist without the other – HaShem gave His infinite Torah to be fulfilled by the Jewish people on a national level in Eretz Yisrael, with a central monarchy in Yerushalayim together with the Sanhedrin, Bet Hamikdash and prophets.

The Meraglim (spies or scouts) were aware of the “soft underbelly” of the newly freed slaves, who were tired of suffering and preferred loving comfort under the protective wing of HaShem and Moshe, rather than the challenges which awaited them in the Holy Land.

The Meraglim were viewed as leaders, when in fact they were being led by the will of the mob.

HaShem recognized that the Meraglim and their generation were not of the quality of Jews who would be capable of serving as His chosen people. The entire generation of men from 20 to 60 died in the following 40 years in the desert, until a better, freer and purer generation came of age who would become the soldiers of Yehoshua Bin Nun.

History has come full circle in our time. HaShem has created a similar set of circumstances so that Am Yisrael would have the opportunity to acquire Absolute Tshuva for the sin of the Meraglim. It is a gift from HaShem – a sign of love between the omnipotent Creator who wishes to absolve his people Yisrael by blotting out the disastrous conduct of the Meraglim.

From the beginning of the State, we are faced with similar circumstances experienced by the generation of the Meraglim.

Today our spiritual leaders are in a position to call for the entire nation as one to leave the galut and ascend to Zion.

However, Absolute Tshuva has its risks. Just as the couple who sinned in the past and now find themselves in similar erotic circumstances can withdraw and achieve Absolute Tshuva, they can also fall to temptation and sin again.

Unfortunately, the Meraglim are very much alive today in the guise of most of the spiritual leaders in the galut. They too recognize the “soft underbelly” of their Chassidim and congregations and dance to their tunes.

Many cloak their evil counsel with the psak (their ruling of law) that distancing themselves from Eretz Yisrael is a mitzva.

They shout at every opportunity that to return to Eretz Yisrael is a sin until HaShem sends the Mashiach. They encourage their willing Chassidim and congregants that it is a mitzva to strengthen and create new communities across the far-flung 50 states and Europe. Those Meraglim who still have a semblance of conscience do not condemn Aliya but do not encourage it.

### **The sin that exists until the end of time**

The Gemara (Suka 52a) quotes Rabbi Yehuda son of Ilayee that in the future HaShem will slaughter the Yetzer Hara – the evil inclination of man. However, the Gemara (Bava Batra 16a) states that the Yetzer Hara and the Angel of Death are one in the same. So if he is an angel who was created by HaShem to serve a necessary purpose, why must he be destroyed?

The answer is that if the Yetzer Hara seduces man by telling him how pleasant it is to sin, then the Yetzer has fulfilled his calling. However, in reality, the Yetzer Hara deviates

from this mission by convincing the Jew that the sin is really a mitzva, that it is a mitzva to hate that other Jew, to throw rocks at a moving car on Shabbat and to maintain the cursed punishment of the galut.

Our fathers sinned twice during their desert experience: on the 17th of Tammuz with the Egel Hazahav (Golden Calf) and on the 9th of Av with the Meraglim.

Rabbeinu Yitzchak (Tosefot Yevamot 72a) states that HaShem forgave the sin of the Egel Hazahav, which is proven by HaShem's command to build the Mishkan in which He will dwell among the people. However, the sin of the Meraglim will be felt by every generation until the end of time.

### **Are you a Jew or Jewish?**

HaShem, the Torah and Eretz Yisrael are the crucial elements in the lives of the Jewish nation. An offensive act against any of them will by necessity evoke dire punishments.

The Jews in the galut, who stand by the wayside while Jewish history is forging ahead in the Holy Land, cannot expect to be immune from heavenly punishment.

In the first stage, the punishment will come through great poverty, and then the loss of young Jewish sons and daughters to the U.S. Selective Service Act now being discussed in the backrooms of Congress.

Let it be very clear to all our brothers and sisters in galut: The most one can hope for there is to be "jewish", because to be a "Jew" one must live in the Land that HaShem sanctified for His chosen people.

It is my fervent prayer that HaShem have pity on them all and arouse within them and in their spiritual leaders the spirit of Absolute Tshuva to leave the hated galut and join Am

Yisrael in HaShem's Holy Palace to live the life of a real Jew.

Shabbat Shalom,

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