

Tetzaveh 5779

BS"D Parashat Tetzaveh 5779

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Tetzaveh and preparation for Purim

Shemot 27:20

וְיִשְׁרָאֵל תְּצִוֵּה לְבָנֶיךָ כִּי תְּמִימָה
וְיִשְׁרָאֵל תְּצִוֵּה לְבָנֶיךָ כִּי תְּמִימָה

And you shall command the Children of Israel, that they take to (for) you clear oil of pressed olives for the light, to keep the eternal flame ablaze

The Midrash Raba (Scriptural exegesis) on this week's parasha compares the Jewish nation with olive oil in two respects: olive oil does not combine with other liquids; and when added to another liquid olive oil rises to the top. So too, the Jewish people maintain a hard core who have never inter-married with Gentiles and never will, and when permitted to, we always rise to the top of society.

But there is a third comparison between us and olive oil: Just as the olive delivers its pure oil through pressure, so too do the Jewish people express their unique genius under duress. However, I take issue with the last comparison that we function best under duress. I understand the comparison to mean that we function best not when we are the victims of duress, but rather when we cause pressure, duress and suffering upon our enemies.

The Gemara (Megila 7a) relates the aftermath of the great miracles that occurred in the days of Mordechai and Esther:

וְעַל-לְבָדֵךְ תְּהִלָּתְךָ : וְעַל-לְבָדֵךְ תְּהִלָּתְךָ : וְעַל-לְבָדֵךְ תְּהִלָּתְךָ!

Rav Shmuel bar Yehuda said:

Esther sent a request to the rabbis, "Establish me for all generations," which Rashi explains as her desire that the rabbis decree a new festival in Israel to recall the miracles by feasting and reading the events.

The request was rejected when the rabbis said to Esther:

וְעַל-לְבָדֵךְ תְּהִלָּתְךָ תְּהִלָּתְךָ תְּהִלָּתְךָ : וְעַל-לְבָדֵךְ

They replied: Your request, if granted, will arouse zealous jealousy of the nations against us

And Rashi explains that the rabbis feared the Gentiles might regard our celebrations not as thanks to the Almighty for saving us, but as expressions of joy over their downfall, thereby paving the way for the shedding of more Jewish blood.

Esther replied to the rabbis:

וְעַל-לְבָדֵךְ תְּהִלָּתְךָ תְּהִלָּתְךָ תְּהִלָּתְךָ : וְעַל-לְבָדֵךְ תְּהִלָּתְךָ

I (the details of the episode) are already written in the chronicles of the kings of Medes and Persia.

Now, at first glance, Esther's reply reflects the thought: since the entire episode was recorded in the national chronicles, the "genie was already out of the bottle", hence

since the Gentiles had already suffered a great defeat, any further symbols of celebration would not increase the hatred more than it was already.

Rashi, however, explains Esther's reply differently:

וְיָדָהֶם יְמִינֵינוּ כִּי כִּי כִּי כִּי כִּי כִּי כִּי כִּי כִּי

They (the Gentiles) will see in the chronicles what happened to them at the hands of the Jewish people.

Rashi's commentary places the emphasis on the fear factor of the Gentiles, who would surely be reluctant to harm the Jews after they had seen what befell them at our hands.

This is a song of a very different melody!

Esther, the beautiful, refined, gentle, nice, elevated Jewish girl is teaching the rabbis of the day a lesson in Jewish history: if we desire to live as free people, then we have to remind the anti-Semites around us that HaShem has blessed us with an iron fist.

Because the rabbis heard the message, we now and forever have the holiday of Purim.

Purim is not an isolated event in Jewish history. It has repeated itself in almost every generation, with, of course, a change of language. At times, the hate has been expressed in Latin, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, German, Polish, Arabic, Farsi, English, in fact in almost every language in the world. That is why the halacha (Torah law) states that if a megillah is written in any other language beside Ivrit (Hebrew), one has completed his obligation of reading the Megillah (scroll) on the condition that he understands that language.

Over the last 2000 years of galut (exile) we were unable to

use our “iron fist” to smash the anti-Semite. But with the grace of HaShem we have now returned home to the land of the Patriarchs, King David, the Maccabi’im and others, and have begun to return to ourselves. We prefer to be “a people of the Book,” but reality has caused us to be also “a people of the sword”. And when TZAHAL (the IDF) uses the sword with cunning and craftiness, HaShem grants us miraculous victories.

This is the spirit of Eretz Yisrael, where the single lamb among the 70 wolves not only survives but thrives, to the astonishment of the wolves.

Unfortunately, there are too many Jews who do not understand that the spirit of Eretz Yisrael makes it incumbent upon us to excel in all the myriad facets of national life. Too many shirk their religious and national responsibilities in the quest for a life of leisure, leaving the future of Am Yisrael in the hands of the hard-core few who study Torah, and take up arms in defense of the Holy Land, and build the nation for the future.

Escape works until one’s Jewish conscience begins to rattle in his brain at night. But if one’s conscience does not cause him duress, he should know that like certain tuma (a state of Halachic impurity) situations, where the infected person is ejected from his home and city, so too is the placid, indifferent, passive, blasé, nonchalant, aloof, unmoved, disinterested, apathetic Jew, not part of the vibrant “hard-core” eternal Am Yisrael.

The reason for the near calamity at the time of Mordechai and Esther was the apathy of the Jews who callously partook of the king’s feast, served on vessels taken from the holy Bet Hamikdash.

The dream of returning to Eretz Yisrael and rebuilding the Bet Hamikdash (Holy Temple) was no longer part of their Jewish agenda.

The building of a Jewish religious, cultural and social life in Persia and other sites in the galut took such precedence over the restoration of Am Yisrael, in Eretz Yisrael in accordance with Torat Yisrael, that when Ezra returned to the Holy Land, less than 43 thousand Jews accompanied him.

The scenario is very similar to Jewish life in today's galu'yot, with the exception of one major factor – there is no Mordechai and Esther in the USA or elsewhere to save the Jews from their fate at the hands of their neighbors.

Seventy years ago, and perhaps even 100 years ago, the unstoppable, irresistible steamroller of Jewish history began moving in the direction of Eretz Yisrael. There is no human force in the world, in any configuration, that can prevent the Jewish people's return home to all the land promised to us by HaShem, and the eventual rebuilding of the Bet HaMikdash.

For the present time, all Jews still have free choice to climb aboard the irresistible steamroller. But history has its time limitations and waits for no man.

Probably, the most forceful and emphatically religious statement in the Megillah is when Mordechai senses Esther's hesitation in involving herself, and declares (Esther 4:14):

מִתְּנִשְׁאָלָה תְּנִשְׁאָלָה מִתְּנִשְׁאָלָה מִתְּנִשְׁאָלָה
מִתְּנִשְׁאָלָה מִתְּנִשְׁאָלָה מִתְּנִשְׁאָלָה מִתְּנִשְׁאָלָה

For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

If the Jews in the galut will join with us, we will all share in the merits. If they do not, who knows what fate awaits them. For it is only here, in Eretz Yisrael, where the words

of Esther as explained by Rashi come true, that:

A horizontal row of 10 identical rectangles. Each rectangle is 2 units high and 10 units wide, divided into a 2x5 grid of squares. The entire row is 20 units wide.

I (the details of the episode) are already written in the chronicles of the kings of Medes and Persia.

And Rashi says:

They (the Gentiles) will see in the chronicles what happened to them at the hands of the Jewish people.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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