

Tzav Shabbat HaGadol 5775

BS"D Parshat Tzav Shabbat HaGadol 5775

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Can Your Imagination Place You at the Exodus?

When the Bet HaMikdash stood there were four Torah mitzvot which were applicable at the Pessach seder: To relate the Pessach saga to one's offspring, to eat matza, to eat the Korban Pessach, and to eat marror (the four cups of wine and the reciting of Hallel are rabbinic additions).

Today in the absence of the Bet HaMikdash only two Torah mitzvot prevail: To relate the Pessach saga to one's offspring and to eat matza.

However there appears in the hagadda text the word "chayav" (obligated) with regard to an act which is not formally a Torah requirement, nor a rabbinic one – but it goes to the heart of the Pessah seder, it is:

בְּעֵת הַסֵּדֶר יִשְׁמַע כָּל אִישׁ וְאִשָּׁה כִּי הָיָה עִתְּוֹ בְּיֵצֵא מִמִּצְרָיִם

(on this night) Every person (man and woman) is required to perceive himself as if he was present at the Exodus from Egypt.

As binding as it is, this obligation is only as vivid as one's imagination. However, my wife and I (and others), have gone through a life experience which at the Pessach seder induces an authentic feeling of the enormity of the historical episode.

The Exodus can be summarized in two words: anticipation and exuberance. The Jews at the time were commanded that on the 10th of Nissan to choose an animal from the sheep or the goat families which had not yet reached one year old. They were to slaughter the animal on the 14th of Nissan and place some of the blood on the two door posts and on the lintel. That night every family or group was commanded to eat the sacrificial meat, while fully dressed including shoes and a walking stick in hand, in preparation of the command to immediately leave Egypt. The anticipation and anxiety were matched only by the feeling of exuberance at the thought that soon they will be leaving behind 210 years of slavery to return to the land of their fathers – Eretz Yisrael.

In the spring of 1962, the date for our aliya was the 24th of Sivan.

The anticipation was excruciating: every minute dragged on like an hour and every day like a year.

The 24th of Sivan finally arrived. Our families and friends at the airport. The wait for the signal to alight the Boeing 707 which was to be our “eagle wings” to freedom from the galut. Finally the call for all passengers to board the plane, where Israeli music and Ivrit filled the air.

The landings in Paris and Rome. The beginning of the plane's descent after passing over Cyprus. The thin green-brown line of Eretz Yisrael visible on the horizon. The touch down of the wheels and the first breath of the holy air. Four steps on the soil of Eretz Yisrael and kneeling down to kiss the earth.

These are the memories which at the Pessach seder are conducive for me to feel as if I was now leaving Egypt with Moshe Rabbeinu.

But with one difference. The Jews of Egypt left behind 210 years of torment, whereas one who goes up to the Land today leaves behind 2000 years of torment.

One was the death of seven holy children in Brooklyn NY by fire. On the theological level there is nothing one can say. On the human level we should learn from this tragedy to love our children. Hug them and kiss them, and thank HaShem every moment for giving them to us. May HaShem in His great mercy find a way to comfort them in their time of agony.

Now one might claim that the second tragedy is on a radically different quantum level of sorrow, and should not be mentioned in the same breath with the death of the seven children. Perhaps, but perhaps the contrary is true.

The other tragedy is the "invasion" of 20 goyim into a shul in London where they wreaked havoc. And instead of 20 dead anti-Semitic bodies on the floor, each terrorist walked out with nary a scratch.

In the larger picture the death of the children will remain a great personal tragedy for the family and their close friends, whereas the fact that 20 goyim can enter a shul on Shabbat, smash and destroy whatever was in their way, and then walk out alive is a call to thousands of other goyim to replicate this act and not just to destroy siddurim but to murder tens and hundreds of Jews.

There is also a vast difference in the aftermath of the two tragedies. The bodies of the children were brought to Eretz Yisrael for burial, whereas the Jews of London and other places in the galut will not decipher the message from HaShem and will remain there under the "protection" of their gentile governments.

I recall my brother Rav Meir hy"d telling me of an incident that occurred in the Boro Park section of Brooklyn. There were repeated anti-Semitic acts, such as smashing car windows, by blacks of the area. Meir sent groups to police the neighborhood to prevent these acts of terror. Several local religious leaders organized a meeting to protest what Meir had

done. One Chassidic Rebbe got up and said without shame, that his father was beaten by the goyim and so was his grandfather, and if need be then he too will be beaten by them. And the decision was taken to tell Meir to stop policing the area.

A pattern of conduct regarding the reaction of Jews to life threatening episodes is apparent.

Two Arabs enter a bet kneset in Har Nof, Yerushalayim and murder four men, as they were praying. And if not for an off duty policeman who gave his life to capture the terrorists, they could have murdered another 10 Jews and escaped, because the people in the bet kneset were from the galut or had received galut education in their yeshivos. Twenty goyim enter a bet kneset in London and after wreaking havoc are able to leave as they came, without the Jews breaking their bones or better yet sending them from this world. When a rabbinical leader in Brooklyn says in public that he is willing to be beaten up by goyim, because that is the fate of a Jew in his galut eyes. When young Jews do not defend themselves physically on college campuses all over the US. Then the Jewish people there are very very sick with a terminal illness called "galut".

Avraham Aveinu was a warrior, who led an army of 318 men in defeating the four foreign kings.

Ya'akov prepared his meeting with Aisav with the possibility that he and his sons would have to fight the enemy.

For Shimon and Levi who destroyed the city of Shechem it was not the first time in their lives that they picked up a sword.

The Torah students of Moshe fought in the desert, and the soldiers of Yehoshua were all talmidai chachamim.

The soldiers of King Shaul who destroyed Amalek and the soldiers of King David were Torah learners.

The men of the Macabees who drove the Greeks from the land were Torah scholars, as were the soldiers of Rabbi Akiva who knew how to kill the enemy.

As we stand now several days before Pessach, it is clear that the reality of the Jews in chutz la'artez is that the galut experience has returned them to the psychological state of slavery.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

Copyright © 5775/2015 Nachman Kahana