

Va'et'chanan and Aikev 5773

BS"D Va'et'chanan Shabat Nachamu and Parashat Aikev 5773

Part A:

Moshe declared before the Jewish nation Devarim 4,5-8):

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⁵ See! I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it.

⁶ Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

⁷ What other nation is so great as to have their god near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we call to him?

⁸ And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this Torah I am setting before you today?

The goal is to create a God fearing society like no other, which will impress the nations of the world with the wisdom and intelligence of the Creator and the greatness of his

chosen people, Yisrael. Today, however, the world is more impressed with the scientific findings of our Weizmann Institute and the discoveries of our Technion, than the way we uphold our Shabbat or the diligence with which we choose our kosher food.

So many people observe the Torah, yet, we are not making any headway in breaking the klipa (shell) of antisemitism which encircles the majority of gentiles. Where did we go wrong? And obviously we did go wrong, because the verse states:

Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people".

With the implication that if the nations are unimpressed with the Jewish people's spiritual "wisdom and understanding," that there is a fundamental failure in our Torah observance.

I suggest:

Part B:

The incidents leading up to the destruction of the Second Temple are recorded in Tractate Gitin beginning with page 55b.

A Jew by the name of Bar Kamtza who was close to the Roman aristocracy, was highly insulted when he was publicly requested to leave a wedding party, without anyone coming to his aid. He decided to take revenge on the Jewish community by convincing Caesar (or another highly placed Roman official) to send an animal to the Temple in order to see if the Kohanim would accept the offering. The Roman sent an animal with Bar Kamtza, who made a cut in its lip (or ear) which renders the animal invalid to be a sacrifice for a Jew, but still valid for a gentile.

A prominent Kohen, by the name of Zecharia ben Avkules, used

his position to reject the sacrifice on the grounds that people who are ignorant of the halacha might conclude that it is permissible to sacrifice animals with physical blemishes, without discerning between blemishes of this type which are permitted for the sacrifice of a gentile.

At the alternate suggestion that Bar Kamtza be killed so that he would not reveal to the Romans that the Kohanim rejected the sacrifice, Zecharia ben Avkules again objected on the grounds that people might mistakenly conclude that one who causes a blemish in an animal intended for a sacrifice is liable for the death penalty.

Under the circumstances, Bar Kamtza was set free. He then informed the Roman that his sacrifice was rejected, which began a process that ended with the destruction of the Temple.

This historical incident is preceded in the Gemara (ibid) with the verse from Proverbs 28,14, as a means of summarizing the actions of the people who brought the nation to tragedy.

:פֶּאֶרְשֵׁי דַעְתּוֹ יִשְׁפֹּט וְעַל אֲדַמְתוֹ יִשְׁפֹּט

Praised is the one who calculates the results of his actions, but whoever hardens his heart (obsessively) falls into evil.

Bar Kamtza was obsessive in his desire for revenge, but so too was the host at the wedding feast who embarrassed Bar Kamtza without considering the possible implications of embarrassing a person like Bar Kamtza.

But the severest criticism was pointed to Rabbi Zecharia ben Avkules who was so stubbornly fearful of offending the halacha, that he became impervious to the potential disaster he was creating.

Had he permitted sacrificing the animal which was halachically permitted, the Temple might not have been destroyed. But his intransigent obsession lest some ignoramus misinterpret what

was done in the Temple – what we call today a “chumra” – without calculating the possible religious, social and national repercussions of his severity, brought about the destruction of the Temple.

The issue can be illustrated as follows: Halachot are like building stones of different sizes and colors and the rabbinic decisions of how and when to implement the halachot is the mortar. A rabbi may not overturn a halacha, just as a laborer cannot change the color or size of the bricks, but just as a laborer must choose which stone to use at a particular stage, a rabbi must use his experience and judgment regarding when to apply the halacha and its supplementary severities (chumrot).

The Gamara (Sota 21b) uses the term “chasid shoteh” – a righteous fool – to describe one whose irrational, rigid and scrupulous fulfillment of the halacha causes tragedy. As in the case of a drowning woman, where the chasid shoyeh looks the other way lest he see her in an immodest situation.

The application of Torah today by certain influential chareidi leaders is aimed to a hermetically closed group, with no desire to emphasize the beauty and wisdom of Yiddishkeit as a way of life for a nation in this modern era, and has shown the wrong face of what we really are.

The most devastating mistake of the chareidi sector is its refusal to recognize the hand of God in the establishment, survival and thriving of our holy Medina.

The weak link in their chain of thought and the mother of all mistakes is their premise that our return to Eretz Yisrael must be headed by great Torah scholars not by secular Jews, like those who spearheaded the Zionist movement at the beginning of the last century.

There are two fallacies in this thinking.

One: If the return to Zion was so dear to their hearts, why

was the ideal of a Jewish State not initiated by the religious leaders of the time? And why were there so few rabbis who established the "Mizrachi" organization which became part of the World Zionist organization? And why, even now after seeing the great miracles of HaShem, do they still withdraw into the ideological isolation of "Mashiach Now," instead of becoming partners in the the major institutions of the Medina, like the military and the work force?

Two: In chapter 9 (parashat Aikev) Moshe recalls the devastating sins of the Jews in the desert perpetrated by the people standing in front of him and by their fathers, including the sin of the Golden Calf and the refusal to enter the Promised land.

וְיָדַעְתֶּם כִּי לֹא עָלְתִּי בְּאֵימַתְכֶם אֶל הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת (ו)
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: 'כִּי אֲנִי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אֲנִי יָדַעְתִּי

⁶ *Understand, then, that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, **for you are a stiff-necked people.***

⁷ *Remember this and never forget how you aroused the anger of the Lord your God in the wilderness. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, **you have been rebellious against the Lord.***

:וְיָדַעְתֶּם כִּי לֹא עָלְתִּי בְּאֵימַתְכֶם אֶל הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת (ו)

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¹³ *And the Lord said to me, "I have seen this people, and they are a stiff-necked people indeed!"*

¹⁴ *Let me alone, so that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven. And I will make you into a nation stronger and more numerous than they."*

אֲנִי אֶפְרָח אֶתְּכֶם וְאֶתְּכֶם אֶפְרָח 'וְ אֶתְּכֶם אֶפְרָח אֶתְּכֶם אֶפְרָח אֶתְּכֶם אֶפְרָח אֶתְּכֶם אֶפְרָח (אֶתְּכֶם)
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¹⁹ *I feared the anger and wrath of the Lord, for He was angry enough with you to destroy you. But again the Lord listened to me.*

: 'וְ אֶתְּכֶם אֶתְּכֶם אֶתְּכֶם אֶתְּכֶם אֶתְּכֶם אֶתְּכֶם אֶתְּכֶם אֶתְּכֶם (אֶתְּכֶם)

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²² *You also made the Lord angry at Taberah, at Massah and at Kibroth Hattaavah.*

²³ *And when the Lord sent you out from Kadesh Barnea, he said, "Go up and take possession of the land I have given you." But you rebelled against the command of the Lord your God. You did not trust Him or obey Him.*

²⁴ *You have been rebellious against the Lord ever since I have known you.*

But with all this very disturbing behavior, HaShem still said to Moshe (10,11):

אֲנִי אֶפְרָח אֶתְּכֶם אֶתְּכֶם אֶתְּכֶם אֶתְּכֶם אֶתְּכֶם אֶתְּכֶם אֶתְּכֶם 'וְ אֶתְּכֶם (אֶתְּכֶם)
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¹¹ *"Go," the Lord said to me, "and lead the people on their way, so that they may enter and possess the land I swore to their ancestors to give them."*

In no way can one compare the conduct of the so-called secular Zionists to the huge transgressions of the Jews in the desert. And, nevertheless, HaShem brought the generation of the desert into Eretz Yisrael as fulfillment of His promise to our fathers Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov.

And today we are living the greatest of miracles surpassing all human rationality, that we have survived 2000 years of exile and the unspeakable Shoah, and even the secular in Eretz Yisrael adamantly demand to remain sons and daughters of the Jewish nation.

The charadie leaders have much to contemplate and much to change, and this week's parasha is a good place to begin.

Unfortunately, a bitter joke I heard has become the bitter reality in many chareidi circles. The season of the archeological dig in search of remnants of the Second Temple period ended. And the head of the dig turned in his report. The only thing we found remaining of the period is the sin'at chinam (unwarranted hatred).

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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