

Vaetchanan-Aikev 5777

BS"D Parashiot Vaetchanan-Aikev 5777

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Whoever controls the Temple Mount...

Devarim 7,12:

וְכִי תִשְׁמְרוּ אֶת כָּל הַבְּרִית הַזֶּה וְעָשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוְּיָהוּ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (וְכִי)
:וְהָיָה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אִתָּנוּ וְהָיָה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אִתָּנוּ וְהָיָה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ אִתָּנוּ 'וְ

¹² *In the wake of your diligence in abiding by these laws and are deliberate in following them, then the Lord your God will uphold His covenant of love with you, as he swore to your ancestors*

The word Aikev refers to one's heel. It is used figuratively to mean "in the wake of" or "consistent", just as one's heels follow in cadence while walking.

Rashi comments that the intention here is also to stress the importance of those mitzvot which one might believe to be peripheral and "trample on them with his heel".

I shall return to this later.

Time and space

The Almighty created for us mortals a two-dimensional world of Time and Space; each independent of the other and each with its own “natural” laws. Time can exist without a spatial entity when a change occurs, and space is not measured by time. HaShem is beyond time because He is at perfect rest and is beyond space because He is infinite.

Shabbat is the absolute, ultimate sanctity of time. It occurs in seven-day cycles independent of all human involvement, contrary to the holy days of the year whose dates are determined by a bet din when declaring the time of the new month (Rosh Chodesh.) The sanctity of Shabbat would be in affect even if there were no Jews to observe it.

The site of the Bet HaMikdash on the Temple Mount in Yerushalayim is the absolute sanctity of space. It was declared so at the moment of creation. As the Gemara (Yoma 54b and many other sources) points out that the planet earth expanded from a primordial point, which was later to become Har HaBayit – the Temple Mount.

The sanctity of Har HaBayit is eternal and absolute, as the Rambam states (Hilchot Bet Habechira 6,16) that the sanctity of the site is derived from the presence of the Holy Shechina and the Shechina is forever present there.

The magnitude of the sanctity of Har Habayit is so immense that it dominates life itself.

Now come for a little walk from my home in the Old City towards the ultimate sanctity of space in the universe from where the Shechina has never departed – Har Habayit.

What do you see?

An enormous mosque called Al Aksa at the southern end of the Mount and a large-domed building called Kipat HaSela – The

Dome of the Rock closer to the center; experts are undecided if it is standing on the place of the Kodesh Kedoshim – Holy of Holies, or on the place of the Miz'bayach [the large altar).

These foreign buildings are there because we were in exile for 2000 years. However, we, with the grace of HaShem, have returned to some parts of Eretz Yisrael including Har Habayit, and are sovereign over all Yerushalayim for the first time in over 2000 years.

A Jewish head and heart would assume, without question, that the foremost place in our consciousness is Har Habayit. That the leading rabbinic figures, especially of the yeshiva world, would demand that every Jew ascend the mountain if not daily, then at the very least, three times a year – Pesach, Shavuot and Succot – after immersing in a mikve and wearing appropriate shoes. And if, for various reasons, we could not demolish these two Moslem abominations, there would be a huge bet kneset on the Mount, housing a yeshiva with the foremost Torah minds of the nation.

That's what one might assume. However, the bitter reality is far, far different.

Despite the Chareidi rabbinate's overwhelming negation of everything the Chief Rabbinate of Israel stands for, they are both in agreement in their negative attitude towards Har Habayit.

The great rabbis, who accompanied Rabbi Akiva to Yerushalayim after the Temple's destruction (Tractate Makot 24a), were devastated when seeing foxes running freely on the Mount and were comforted by Rabbi Akiva only because of the future that he predicted. These same rabbis would rend their clothing and pull out their hair if they knew that, in the future, there would be rabbis who would prohibit Jews from ascending the Mount, while being totally indifferent, passive, blasé, aloof,

unmoved, unconcerned, apathetic and phlegmatic to our worst enemies doing as they please in the holiest place in the world. Never a demonstration, never a protest – total and absolute capitulation.

I, and the hundreds of other rabbanim of the dati-leumi persuasion, and the thousands of our adherents who do ascend the Mount, are enraged by the reality of what we see there. The Moslem Wakf (religious council) by consent of the Israeli government, which is empowered by the Chareidi rabbis, are the “masters” of the Mount. A Jew who enters the Mount is identified and checked against a master list of “provocateurs.” Then the Jew is lectured to by a Jewish policeman on the prohibition against praying or even moving one’s lips on the Mount. If he has any religious article on him, i.e. a siddur, he may not enter the Mount.

The Chareidi prohibition does not stem from a fear that one might enter the prohibited area of the Temple compound and be liable for the Karet punishment (severing of the soul’s connection to its Creator). Because even though we do not know the exact place where the Temple stood, we do know where it was not, and we are careful to walk in a wide perimeter near the edges of the Mount.

To put it more succinctly: if one fears transgressing on a Karet violation, than he should not marry nor should he get out of bed on Shabbat, for in both of these issues the chances of Karet are much greater than ascending the Temple Mount.

It appears that in the cosmic competition between Time and Space, between the time of Shabbat and the space of Har HaBayit, Shabbat emerges victorious – probably because the promise of Shabbat is kugel, kishka and cholent, while the promise of Har Habayit is struggle and mesirut nefesh (self-sacrifice).

What makes Har Habayit the eternal repository of sanctity?

Our rabbis taught that Moshe beseeched HaShem 515 times to enter Eretz Yisrael, the gematria (number equivalent) of the word va'et'chanan. Moshe did not request a homestead of lush rolling land, nor did he request a palatial home befitting the first king of Israel. What he did request was simply to enter the land for one purpose, as the Gemara (Sota 14a) says: "Was it to eat of its fruit or find pleasures of the Land that Moshe wished to enter? No! It was for one reason. Moshe prayed for the opportunity to keep mitzvot in Eretz Yisrael."

It would appear that the Gemara is at odds with the Midrash in describing Moshe's prayer to Hashem.

The midrash relates that HaShem refused Moshe to enter into the Land. Moshe pleaded: "If I cannot enter in a live state, let my body be brought into the land." Hashem's answer is no! "Let me enter in the form of an animal so I can tread on the Land." No! "Then let me enter as a bird without touching the Land." No!

Now, if according to the Gemara Moshe wanted to enter the Land to keep its mitzvot, why would it satisfy him to enter as an animal or a bird?

We must therefore conclude that there is a spiritual experience that even an animal or a bird can sense. Just being present in the land, even if one does nothing else, is the fulfillment of a mitzva – and this even an animal or a bird can do.

Now, if the Land is so holy that even its air space is sanctified (the Zohar, the classic text of the Kabbalah, says that Eretz Yisrael is directly under the kisay ha'kavod – the Heavenly Throne, and the earthly Yerushalayim is directly under the heavenly Yerushalayim) and influences the spirit of

all who are present here, the question arises: How can we live as “normal” human beings, doing the things which people must do in order to maintain our personal and national lives? How do we get up in the morning and go to work, deal in commerce and industry, fix our cars when they break, eat, sleep, and attend to our bodily needs? The whole Land should be as the Kodesh HaKodashim of the Temple, if even an animal is stirred by the sanctity of the Land.

I suggest:

Newly-grown crops in Eretz Yisrael are designated as “tevel” (forbidden to eat unless Teruma and Maaser tithes are separated from them) and no part may be eaten because of their sanctity, the punishment being the termination of one’s life prior to the time allotted to him at birth. The prohibition is annulled by separating the required tithes as stated in the Torah. One of the tithes is “Terumah Gedola” which is given to a kohen. The amount of teruma from the Torah is one grain of wheat from an entire crop. Not being a farmer, I would give a wild guess that there are close to millions of grains in a decent size wheat crop, which would make the teruma gedola totally insignificant in terms of quantity. Nevertheless, this (and the other tithes) are the factors determining if one lives his life through or dies earlier.

We can conclude that this one single grain concentrates in itself the sanctity of the entire crop; for in the spiritual world, size, space, numbers, etc., are irrelevant (the Shamayim – the dwelling place of God and other heavenly beings – has a different set of physics and chemistry).

Accordingly, I suggest that we live and function in Eretz Yisrael despite its inherent sanctity, because HaShem has separated a piece of teruma which concentrates in it the necessary amount of kedusha rendering the rest of the country kadosh, but less than the status of the Holy of Holies.

That “piece” of teruma is Har Habayit – the Temple Mount.

Rambam states that even if the halachic status of Eretz Yisrael in terms of the agricultural laws was changed by the destruction of the Temple, the halachic status of the Temple Mount has not changed since the time of King Solomon; and hence, we may offer up sacrifices even in our times (if we could overcome several halachic obstacles, such as the exact place of the altar and who is an authentic kohen etc.).

The Temple Mount is the holiest site in the Jewish world, and proof of this is what the great Ramban wrote to his son after arriving in Yerushalayim, “Whatever is more holy is more desecrated – Yehuda is more desecrated than the Galil, and Yerushalayim is the most desecrated of all.”

If you are shuddering at the thought of how many “karet” transgressions one performs when ascending the Mount, permit me to fill you in on a little halachic geography.

Har Habayit is made up of two parts. In the center is solid bedrock, which is surrounded by landfill made by Hordus (Herod) when he turned the Temple Mount from a square into a rectangle. The building of the Bet Hamikdash was 100 amot high (50 meters) – equivalent to a 25-story building. Hordus did not build with steel and aluminum but with huge stones, like those in the Kotel (the Wailing Wall); so the sheer weight of the Bet Hamikdash was too heavy to be held up by landfill. This means that even though we do not know where the exact site is, we do know where it is not; and so we tread only on the landfill. Indeed, the Kotel is no more than a supporting wall for the landfill to prevent slippage.

Were it in my power, I would close off the Kotel and hang a big sign on it saying, “All this because of sin’at chinam (baseless hatred),” and then direct the people to Har Habayit.

In the reality of our contemporary religious, geopolitical, and military situation, whoever controls the Temple Mount

controls Eretz Yisrael emotionally and religiously, and his “God” is victorious. And religious emotions are the dominant factors here in the Middle East.

Strength in numbers

On the practical level. The reality on the Temple Mount will be decided by numbers. If years ago several hundred Jews ascended the Mount a year the numbers are now in the many thousands. Things will change when the numbers will be in the tens and hundreds of thousands of Jews. At that time the population pressure will force the changes and Jews will be able to pray and perform other religious practices on the Mount.

The Chareidi segment will join, and even lead the great numbers, as they are beginning to change now when they see that the Halachic decisions of the dati-leumi rabbis are the ones which are pertinent for our generation.

The most important mitzva

To return to the beginning of this message.

The most important mitzva in our time is the one that Jews “tread on with their heels” – to ascend the Temple Mount on foot and declare that here we will build the third Bet Hamikdash.

It’s enlightening to recall the words of our leaders at the time of building the second Bet Hamikdash, as recorded in the book of Ezra chapter 4.

וְהָיוּ אֵלֶיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְהָיוּ אֵלֶיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ (א)

: וְיִשְׂרָאֵל

וְכִשְׁמָעוּ הָעַמִּים הָאֵלֶּם הַשְׂמָרִיטִים וְהַבְּנִימִינִים וְהָאֲחֵרִים (וְ)
הַיִּשְׂרָאֵלִים וְהַיְּהוּדִים וְהַיְּהוֹשֻׁעַ וְהָרֹאשִׁים הָאֵלֶּם הַשְׂמָרִיטִים וְהַבְּנִימִינִים
וְהָאֲחֵרִים : וְיִשְׂרָאֵל

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וְהָאֲחֵרִים : וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְהַיְּהוֹשֻׁעַ וְהָרֹאשִׁים

¹ *When the enemies of Judah and Benjamin (Samaritans and others) heard that the exiles were building a temple for the Lord, the God of Israel,*

² *they came to Zerubbabel and to the heads of the families and said, "Let us help you build because, like you, we seek your God and have been sacrificing to him since the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here."*

³ *But Zerubbabel, Yehoshua and the other heads of the families of Israel answered, "You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the Lord, the God of Israel..."*

When the time comes (may it be soon) for us to rebuild the Bet Hamikdash, the nations of the world will offer the Medina "foreign aid" to be partners in HaShem's new world. And we shall say to them, as did our fathers, "You have no part with us in building a temple to our God. We alone will build it for the Lord, the God of Israel.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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