

Vayaira 5777

BS"D Parashat Vayaira 5777

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Part One: Yitzchak's Sacrifice

The Gemara (Shabbat 89b) records that at some unspecified time in history HaShem related or will relate to Avraham Avienu "banecha chatu'li" – your sons have sinned against me. And Avraham replied (or will reply) that they should be severely punished. HaShem is not satisfied by this reply and repeats to Ya'akov that his sons have sinned. Ya'akov, like his grandfather Avraham, replied that they should be severely punished for their sins.

HaShem is now displeased with Ya'akov.

He then informed Yitzchak of the low spiritual state of his children, to which Yitzchak defends the Jewish nation, with the major thrust of his defense being the claim that the episode of the Akeida (the binding and near sacrifice of Yitzchak) is sufficient reason for HaShem to forgive the transgressions of Am Yisrael.

What makes the episode of Akeidat Yitzchak, recorded in our parasha, so essential in our requests for forgiveness.

I submit:

The call to sacrifice Yitzchak was made by HaShem to Avraham – not to Yitzchak. So, in fact, Yitzchak had the prerogative to refuse. And had he done so, Avraham would have been exempted

from his obligation due to causes beyond his control, and Yitzchak could not have been held liable, because as stated he was not commanded.

Yet Yitzchak agreed to be the sacrifice demanded by HaShem of his father Avraham, for one reason. Despite the fact that HaShem did not command Yitzchak to give up his life, Yitzchak knew that it was HaShem's will that he be sacrificed on the altar on what was to become the Temple Mount, in Yerushalayim.

By Yitzchak bringing up the episode of the Akeida, to counter HaShem's implicit warnings that He has taken notice of our dire sins, Yitzchak is saying to HaShem: "You did not command me to relinquish my life at 37 years old under my father's knife. Yet I agreed for one reason – I knew that that was your wish. We, the Jewish people, also have a wish – it is to be loyal sons to You, our Father-in-Heaven. But we are human beings, made of flesh and blood, distracted and bombarded by the yetzer hara (our corporeal instincts) which seeks to drive us away from the holy Torah. So just as I yielded to what I knew was your desire, so too listen to the wishes of Your People Am Yisrael and forgive them for their sins.

A true Jew is one who not only fulfills the implicit mitzvot of the Written and Oral Torah, but carries out even the implied, tacit and silent wishes of Hashem.

The principle of doing HaShem's silent wishes is upon us every moment. A Jew who lives only according to the letter of the Halacha while ignoring the spirit of Halacha, is an halachic robot who does not come even close to what a Jew must be. The taking of that "one more step" which we call "lifnim mei'shurat hadin" (beyond the requirements of the law) is what defines a Jew as being God fearing. The Torah says we must give tzedakah (charity). So, one can give money to a needy person like you throw a bone to a dog, or he can speak to the person and give him hope that things in life have a way of turning around.

The Zohar states that there are two kinds of Gehennom – one of fire and the other of ice.

I believe that the fire is for those who have committed a sin in heated passion and the Gehennom of ice awaits those who have fulfilled a mitzva with lack of passion.

Stairway to Heaven

I am fully aware of the pilpulistic contortions and meandering taken by some Halachic “authorities” in the galut to prove that there is no mitzva today to live in Eretz Yisrael.

Open a Chumash to any parsha – you will not be able to escape Eretz Yisrael. Most learned Jews know that it is a Torah mitzva in every generation for every Jew to live in Eretz Yisrael when the gates to the Holy land are open.

But even if you believe that the official mitzva is only when the Mashiach comes, stand in front of a mirror and ask yourself, “Is it HaShem’s desire that a Jew live in Pittsburgh or in His Holy Land of Eretz Yisrael? HaShem indeed wants every Jew to be in the Land that He chose over all others to house His holy Temple and declared the Temple Mount to be the “Stairway to Heaven”.

It is HaShem’s desire that His children be in Eretz Yisrael. Even if your learned rabbi told you that it is not an official mitzva today, it was Yitzchak’s decision to give his life because he knew that it was HaShem’s wish.

Part Two: The Savior of Yisrael

The third chapter of Birkat Hamazon (grace after meals) was authored by Kings David and Shlomo, and deals with

Yerushalayim and the Bet Hamikdash (the holy temple). The Gemara (Brachot 49a) discusses the wording of its closing blessing with the conclusion that one may say "Blessed are You... the re-builder of Yerushalayim", or "Blessed are You... the savior of Yisrael".

Rashi explains that the phrase "the savior of Yisrael" is equivalent to saying "the re-builder of Yerushalayim" because the salvation of Am Yisrael is dependent on the re-building of Yerushalayim.

My Friend the Yerushalayim Dust-man

Where I live in the Old City of Yerushalayim, there is a dust-man (sanitation worker) who cares for our streets and plazas.

Aharon and I are friends and speak almost every day. He once told me that his wealthy grandfather came from Iran to Eretz Yisrael and established a chain of carpet stores. He gave a store to each of his sons except to Aharon's father who preferred to be a construction worker to build up Yerushalayim with his own hands.

Aharon followed in his father's way until he was hurt on a site and could no longer work in construction and became the dust-man of the Jewish Quarter.

A while back, Aharon and I had a heated argument. Aharon claimed that he was a simple Jew in Yerushalayim working hard to support his family. I argued that he, like his father, is a tzadik (righteous one) whose real value in heaven one cannot fathom. In order to emphasize my case, I said to Aharon: "You are, in the eyes of HaShem, more important than the most illustrious spiritual leader in the galut, for you are advancing the advent of the Mashiach, whereas the spiritual leaders in the galut with every shiur, drasha, new shul, yeshiva and mikveh repulse the Mashiach as they strengthen

Jewish communities in the gentile galut.

The Perigee

Our rabbis have likened the Jewish people to the moon, because we both wane and nearly vanish but always re-appear.

The moon's orbit has an elliptical shape, sometimes it is closer to Earth than other times. Astronomers call the closest-to-the-Earth moment the perigee. This week on November 14 the moon became full within about two hours of perigee making it an extra-supermoon, and the Earth was bathed in 30% more moonlight (*learn more about this rarity of such a supermoon at NASA and EarthSky.org*).

This is a good omen for our nation. What is interesting is the fact that the last time such a super-supermoon occurred was in the year 1948 – when Medinat Yisrael was established.

In conclusion: It is HaShem's desire that His children be in Eretz Yisrael, even if your learned rabbi tells you that it is not a mitzva today. Remember, it was Yitzchak's decision to give his life because he knew that it was HaShem's wish. It is HaShem's wish that the Jews leave the galut and return to the Holy Land.

Shabbat Shalom,

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