

Vayak'heḥ 5777

BS"D Parashat Vayak'heḥ 5777

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

The Power of National Service

The last four parshiot of Shemot deal with the first national project of Am Yisrael – the holy Mishkan (Tabernacle) – that embraced all segments of the nation's population.

Three monetary “endowments” were required: one half shekel with which to purchase the animals and other items for public sacrifices; another half shekel from which were formed the base supports for the Mishkan's ten amot (five-meter-high) wooden planks; and an open donation for all the other articles required for the Mishkan's construction and sacrificial activities.

A national project of Am Yisrael that required the heart, soul, and physical efforts of every Jew.

Laboring vs. Serving

Pirkei Avot (1,2) quotes Shimon Hatzadik:

העולם קיים על ידי שלשה דברים: תורה, עבודה, וצדקה.
The world is dependent on three things: Torah, Labor, and Good Deeds.

*The survival of the world is dependent on three things:
Torah, Labor, and Good Deeds.*

Torah refers to the intimate connection one achieves with the Creator when delving in intellectual Torah study. It can be roughly compared to an electronic receiver activated by a transmitter when both are tuned to the same frequency.

Labor refers to the activities performed by the Kohanim and Levi'im in the Bet HaMikdash.

Good deeds are the minute by minute social interactions with one's fellow Jew in accordance with the letter and spirit of the verse: "Love thy fellow Jew as yourself".

As a Kohen, the concept of "Labor" in the Bet HaMikdash is especially intriguing.

Whenever I perform any of the functions incumbent upon a Kohen in our time, like the daily blessing of the congregation or a pidyon haben (redemption of a first born male child), including all the manifold functions in my mind's eye that I and my fellow Kohanim will perform in the rebuilt Bet HaMikdash, the words "labor" or "work" are the furthest from my mind. When the Bet HaMikdash will again be built on the Temple Mount, we will not labor, nor will we work. We will serve.

Indeed, the word "lechahen" (to function as a Kohen) means to serve – not to labor.

I recall my wife once asking our son, who is a senior officer in Tzahal, how many hours a day he works. He replied: "Imma, I don't work. I serve".

On the conceptual level what he was saying was that when one is involved in spiritual matters – Torah study, mitzvot -the most lofty being defending Jewish lives (which defers even Shabbat and Yom Kippur), one does not work or labor, but rather one serves HaShem, as a child serves a parent.

In a wider sense, we in Eretz Yisrael, notwithstanding one's

profession, serve HaShem and the Jewish nation. This is the meaning of Moshe's message when he informed Am Yisrael that HaShem had declared them to be:

מְלָכָה קוֹהָנִים וְעַמ־קֹדֶשׁ

A kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation

That even though Kohanim make up about 5% of the nation, in Eretz Yisrael where we all contribute to HaShem's mandated goal of fashioning a God centered society through agricultural halakhot, industry, medicine and road paving, we are all ascended to the status of Kohen, for here we all serve HaShem.

A friend from Bnei Brak once told me the following incident involving his teenage daughter. She was normal in every way, until with no apparent reason, she suddenly became extremely introverted. After many failed attempts to persuade the girl to disclose the reason for her changed behavior, she finally revealed the reason for her despondency.

She never knew what her father's profession was. Until one day when traveling from Petach Tikva to Bnei Brak, she saw her father paving the road. She described her profound embarrassment because her friends also saw her father – a common laborer.

He then told his daughter the following: "True, I am not a rosh yeshiva nor am I a talmid chacham, however, on the road that I am paving, many thousands of people will travel. The vast majority will be going to perform a Torah mitzvah, each in his own way. As a teacher or student, a soldier, a son or daughter going to see a parent, or the myriad activities that make up one's life. In the world to come when they calculate my mitzvot, I will have a share in every one of the mitzvot from all the millions of cumulative kilometers traveled on the

road I helped build by people who will be implementing the Torah in their lives in Eretz Yisrael.”

His daughter’s eyes opened widely. She kissed her father and begged for forgiveness for not understanding that in the holy land whatever ones does, is by definition an act of holiness.

The 20 Percent

Today, on the 19th of Adar, our grandson Shai, son of our youngest daughter Shulamit and her husband Uri, was inducted into the tank corps of Tzahal, where his older brother Amir is already serving. Shai is named for my father Harav Yechezkel Shraga Kahana, who was born in Tzfat in 1904. What has transpired in the 113 years since my father’s birth, when Eretz Yisrael was under domination of the Ottoman Empire, until the day when Shai became part of a Merkava 4 tank unit, defies the imagination. But one thing is clear, nothing could have happened had it not been for HaShem who loves, aids and abets those Jews who sacrifice in order to serve Am Yisrael.

At this time, so close to Pesach, we should recall that only 20 percent of the Jews merited to leave Egypt. They were the ones who felt compelled to serve HaShem; while the other 80 percent died there because they chose to serve themselves.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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