

Vayakhel-Pekudai 5778

BS"D Parashiot Vayakhel-Pekudai 5778

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The Metamorphosis of the Jewish Nation

After serving as HaShem's chosen people for 3500 years, we can say with some degree of accuracy that HaShem relates to the Jewish people through extended periods of passive concealment followed by dramatic spurts of historic change.

After 2000 years of frustrating concealment, permeated with hundreds of millions of prayers and tears, HaShem presented Am Yisrael with His greatest gift since the days of Chanuka – Medinat Yisrael.

The Medina serves a dual purpose:

1- Its immediate function was to raise up the remnant of our people – both the survivors and the Jews who escaped the horrors of the Shoah – who had fallen into deep depression, despair and hopelessness when the awesome unbearable tragedy of the Shoah became known.

How could HaShem have done this to Am Yisrael? Where was HaShem when the Esavs of Europe were destroying His people? Our rabbis could not present any viable answers to these questions, and the nation was on its way to mass assimilation and abandonment of anything Jewish.

This was the feeling in 1945 at the end of the Shoah. Why remain Jewish when HaShem has abandoned, relinquished and deserted the covenant He had initiated with our forefathers?

If a king will arise from the House of David who diligently contemplates the Torah and observes its mitzvot as prescribed by the Written Law and the Oral Law as David, his ancestor, and will compel all of Israel to walk in (the way of the Torah) and rectify the breaches in its observance, and fight the wars of God, we may, with assurance, consider him Mashiach.

If he succeeds in the above, builds the Temple in its place, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, he is definitely the Mashiach.

It could happen in the near future, that a vacuum of political leadership will commence, when our parliamentary system will be unable to form a viable government. This coupled with the enemy "at our gates" will create the undesirable necessity for the army to step into the vacuum and declare military rule in the country.

And at some point, the Chief of Staff will be a product of the religious-Zionist yeshiva system and begin the process of redemption as put forth by the Rambam.

This might happen, or any one of the many other scenarios. In any event the Medina will have to exit our present state of religious stagnation in order to metamorphose into the next stage of the Jewish nation's forward thrust to redemption and restoration of HaShem's presence in our religious-national life.

How can we be a Kingdom of Kohanim?

This Shabbat we will finish reading from the book of Shemot, and at the Mincha service we will commence reading Vayikra, also known as “Torat Kohanim” – the book of laws for Kohanim.

Moshe descended from Mount Sinai with a message from HaShem (Shemot 19,6):

וְאַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵלֶיךָ יִהְיֶה לְקֹהֵן וְלְגוֹי קֹדֶשׁ
וְאַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵלֶיךָ יִהְיֶה לְקֹהֵן וְלְגוֹי קֹדֶשׁ
וְאַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵלֶיךָ יִהְיֶה לְקֹהֵן וְלְגוֹי קֹדֶשׁ
וְאַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵלֶיךָ יִהְיֶה לְקֹהֵן וְלְגוֹי קֹדֶשׁ

You shall be for me, a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation

How can we be a “kingdom of kohanim” when only about five percent of the Jewish nation are kohanim?

Answer: Kohanim are set apart from the rest of the nation in five spheres: food, clothing, habitation, marriage and tahara (ritual purity).

- A kohen is entitled to eat terumah (the priestly tithe), meat from sin and guilt offerings and the remnants of meal offerings, all of which are forbidden to non-Kohanim.
- The kohen has specific garments which are forbidden to a non-Kohen to wear.
- Kohanim lived in towns earmarked for them, such as Nov and Anatot, while the rest of the nation were entitled to live anywhere in Eretz Yisrael.
- Kohanim are more restricted regarding who they can wed.
- And Kohanim are more restricted regarding matters of tahara (ritual purity).

These very five spheres that characterize kohanim apart from other Jews, are the same five spheres that distinguish the Jewish People from Gentiles.

- We are commanded regarding dietary laws, while a non-Jew is allowed to eat everything except the limb cut from of a living creature.
- We have laws that affect what we wear, such as not mixing wool and linen in our clothing (Vayikra 19:19), and the laws of wearing the ritual fringes (tzitzit – Bamidbar 15:38), which do not apply to gentiles.
- Jews have to live in the Land of Israel, whereas a non-Jew is allowed to live anywhere on the face of the earth.
- Apart from the most serious forbidden sexual liaisons, a non-Jew can marry whomever he wishes, but Jews are limited in their marriages.
- Finally, on the level of ritual purity, there is no tuma to a non-Jew while alive, unlike a Jew, who can become tamai (ritually impure) even during his lifetime.

Hence, we learn that HaShem elevated the status of the Jewish People to that of the “Kehuna” vis-à-vis the rest of the nations.

In HaShem’s relations with Am Yisrael there are no “complimentary gifts”. Every merit bestowed upon us comes with accompanying responsibility and accountability. As a “Kingdom of Kohanim” each individual Jew, like each and every kohen, must serve in Hashem’s holy “precinct” – kohanim in the Bet Hamikdash and Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom,

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