

Va'ye'chi 5779

BS"D Parashat Va'ye'chi 5779

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IRRELEVANCE IS IRREVERENCE

In the last parasha of the Torah, Zot Habracha, Moshe blesses every tribe, except for one – Shimon; because of their sinful conduct with the Midianite women. The implication was that Shimon would no longer merit a tribal area in the holy land, thus relegating Shimon to irrelevancy in future Jewish history. Rashi relates that Yehuda came to Shimon's rescue by praying to HaShem and begging Moshe to reconsider his position. Moshe did so, allotting Shimon an enclave within the tribal area of Yehuda consisting of several cities but no wide spaces of land. But at least Shimon retained a degree of relevancy.

The rejection of a Jew from the mainstream of our nation deems him irrelevant for our future, and irrelevancy is synonymous with a wasted life in this world, with limited merits in the next.

To my brothers and sisters in Chutz La'aretz:

Now that no one is listening, let's have a candid conversation about us, we in Eretz Yisrael and you in galut.

Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers 3,1) quotes the teaching of Rabbi Akiva Ben Mehal'el which is customarily recited at a funeral procession:

תְּרֵשׁוּ מִן־עֲמָלָךְ וְלֹא־תִּתְּנַשְּׁאַל
לְמִן־עֲמָלָךְ וְלֹא־תִּתְּנַשְּׁאַל

Seriously ponder three things and you will not fall into sin:

1. From where you came; the humble biological beginnings from which you were conceived, 2. Where you are going: to a grave, and 3. Before whom will your soul give a calculation and reckoning of your deeds: before the Almighty.

I would humbly contribute an additional set of alternative considerations:

1. From where you came: from the revelation at Mount Sinai with Moshe, from liberating the holy land with Yehoshua, from establishing the monarchy with David and from building the Bet Hamikdash with Melech Shlomo, 2. Where are you going: what is the path that you are taking in the short years that HaShem grants you in this life? and 3. Before whom will your soul give a calculation and reckoning of your deeds: before the Almighty.

Numbers 1 and 3 are intended to impact heavily upon 2, what path are you taking in the short years that HaShem grants you in this life.

I will return to this.

Last week two Israeli soldiers, Yuval Mor Yosef and Yosef Kohen were murdered by an Arab terrorist near the settlement of Givat Asaf.

Yosef Kohen's stepfather Rabbi Eliyahu Merav of Yerushalayim Bet Shemesh (Yosef's father passed away) was interviewed by

the media. The rabbi is a most impressive figure, with a full flowing white beard and distinguished Jewish face. The rabbi is a very modest man. When asked, he answered that he too served in Tzahal. The following day Rabbi Merav's past was revealed to the media. He was born in kibbutz Bet Alfa in the Jezreel Valley which belonged to the now defunct Hashomer Hatzair radical Marxist Communist movement – where Hashem was not permitted to enter the front gate. Rabbi Merav was a fighter pilot who fought in the Yom Kippur war. At some point he found Hashem, left the kibbutz and was drawn to the Breslav ideology.

This very impressive man unintentionally became a star. The interviewer asked Rabbi Merav; who are you? To which he answered, "I'm an Israeli". In Rabbi Merav's mind, to be an Israeli means to cling to the Torah and to Hashem, and to serve the Jewish nation in every way.

He related that the pain his family is now undergoing is tremendous. "Yosef was a pure soul, genuine, and beautiful. He was a sacrifice for all of Israel. We sent him to the army as a messenger for the family". Rabbi Merav said, "Yosef observed the Torah completely. He understood that at this time, unfortunately, we have to maintain a powerful army. We have enemies who wish to kill us, literally. They don't understand that the nation of Israel is everlasting; no one can destroy us. We are the children of God. So, we sent Yosef, our dear son, to be one of the people that creates the everlasting chain. May he rest in peace".

Rabbi Merav related what happened at the last Shabbat meal before Yosef's murder. "I asked the family that each one tell one thing for which he or she is thankful to HaShem. Yosef said, "I am thankful to HaShem for giving me the merit to protect Am Yisrael".

Yosef, and indeed all the Jews in Eretz Yisrael are relevant to the future of the Jewish nation. Even in their death Yosef

Kohen and Yuval Mor Yosef are very relevant to the future of this nation because of the influence they have on the millions of Israelis who read about them.

The magic word of a Jew's life is relevance; to be a link in the eternal chain that unites us with our great past and great future.

The Jewish communities in the galut are irrelevant to our future. The Rosh Yeshiva of Lakewood gives great Torah discourses and is greatly relevant to the student body of Lakewood; however, Lakewood Yeshiva itself is irrelevant to the future of our people. The heads of the yeshivot in Cleveland and Baltimore are great role figures for their yeshivot, however, their yeshivot are irrelevant to the future of our people. All these yeshivot and Jewish communities in the galut are exercises in futility because they are historically irrelevant.

One might be the kingpin in his community; the mainstay of Jewish life in Houston, Texas or Monroe NY, but these places are only dots on a map which are irrelevant to the future generations of our people, and their communities will probably no longer exist in a few decades.

Taken all together, the net spiritual input and mighty efforts on the part of the spiritual leaders in the galut can be compared to a vehicle whose transmission is in neutral and the driver pushes the accelerator through the floor. It makes a lot of noise but goes nowhere! Full gas in neutral!

Now dear reader you might ask, how will my aliya make a difference? How can I personally achieve relevancy to the future of God's people?

The Gemara in Ketubot 103b describes the impressive funeral of Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi:

הַמְּלֵאָה מֵת :הַמְּלֵאָה מֵת מֵת ,הַמְּלֵאָה מֵת מֵת

On the day when Rebbi (Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi) died, a voice came from heaven saying, "All who are present at the funeral of Rebbi have merited to be included in the world to come".

The Gemara refers not only to those who actively participated in the funeral by saying a eulogy or any other necessary activity, but also to those who were passively present, because their participation and identification with what was occurring was sufficient to grant them a place in Olam Haba.

All Jews now in Medinat Yisrael, even those who fill a passive role in society, are relevant to our future by their very identification with the rebuilding of the Jewish state.

In conclusion:

Observant Jews in the galut have made impressive strides in building their sub-cultures within gentile societies. However, since the future of our nation rests only on the efforts of the Jews in Eretz Yisrael, the Jewish communities in the galut are irrelevant to our future. On the 5th of Iyar 5708, the day the Medina was declared, HaShem lowered the curtain on the galut and let it begin to fade into oblivion.

The great halls of Torah study in the galut could easily become relevant to our future if they would actively encourage their students to come on aliya; but unfortunately, the winds that blow in those institutions are not directed eastward, their orientation is to seek out the faults of our Medina rather than "see the good of Yerushalayim".

Shabbat Shalom,

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