

Yom Kippur 5778

BS"D Parashat Yom Kippur 5778

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Photos on my wall

On the wall in front of my desk there are several photos.

One of my father Z"L pondering over a Gemara. Another of my beautiful Mother at the age of 16 in the city of Dvinsk Latvia where her father was a renowned Torah scholar. A photo of our youngest son who is today a general in the IDF, receiving a citation for successfully completing a daring mission behind enemy lines by the general of the northern command.

A picture of the Lubavitcher Rebbe giving me two dollars in return for two books I had authored and presented to the Rebbe.

And two more photos. One of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp, with three Israeli F-16 war planes flying above. There is a big story behind that flight. It was about 10-15 years ago that Israel and Poland agreed that planes could fly over the camps. The pilots who were chosen were sons of parents who survived those death camps. As they were approaching, the planes swooped down over the camps in a symbolic sign of reverence. The Polish authorities immediately called our Ministry of Defense and complained that the deal was that the planes would not fly under 30,000 feet. Our ministry made contact with the commander of the flight. He replied that the last time Jews took orders from the Poles was 60 years ago.

The other is a frame with two pictures. One is the well-known

photo of the little boy in Warsaw with his hands up and German soldiers aiming their rifles at him. Next to it is a photo of Israeli soldiers with talit and tefilin sitting atop a tank.

The caption under the picture of the little boy reads “Good Jewish boy”; the caption under the picture of the soldier reads: “Bad Jewish boy”.

When Jews are pursued, persecuted, and murdered, gentiles called us “good Jewish boys and girls”, but when we survived them, established our own independent state and defended our right to live, we became in their eyes “bad Jewish boys and girls”.

What distinguishes the three pilots and the tank soldier from the little Jewish boy in Warsaw are two words – Jewish Pride.

For 2000 years the gentiles deprived us of our innate pride at being God’s chosen people. This lack of pride has resulted in the present-day assimilation of millions of our people who are unable to see or feel their elite status as sons of God’s chosen people.

Lack of Jewish pride fuels the disastrous assimilation among the Jews in the galut. In the U.S., in seven out of every 10 weddings involving a non-orthodox Jew, the spouse is gentile!

But that should not surprise anyone, because the absence of Jewish education and mitzvot arouses the question, why remain a Jew? After which the path to assimilation is smooth and comfortable.

Genuine, sincere pride is needed

At the most dramatic moment in the “Unetana tokef” liturgy

(prayer chanted prior to the Kedushah prayer on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur declaring that we shall ascribe holiness to this day), we declare:

תשובה תפלה וצדקה יכולים להתגבר על פסוק שלילי

Repentance, Prayer and Charity have within their power to negate a negative decree.

Teshuva (repentance) refers to the sinner's relationship with himself, as he experiences deep remorse through – introspection in order to escape the torment of his conscience.

Tefila (prayer) refers to the sinner's relationship with HaShem.

Tzedaka (charity) is his relationship with his fellow man.

Despite the differences, they are all predicated on one single quality – genuine, sincere pride in being Jewish.

There is no pride in being Jewish in the galut where the Jew is a tolerated minority. Only in Eretz Yisrael where we are a majority, is a Jew free to feel his essence, his elitist status, as one of God's chosen people. Here his desire for teshuva and to draw close to the Creator can find expression. A Jew who divides his allegiance between HaShem and citizenship in a gentile society cannot feel what it means to be a member of the chosen people.

Disgracing the Holy Name

A Jew on Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur in the galut can be compared to one who is in a cesspool up to his neck while holding a bar of soap; or as in the words of Chazal אדם אחד המטביל בברייתא ונתן בידו חיה מתה one who is immersed in a mikvah while holding a dead tamei (impure) rodent.

Rambam, based on the Gemara Yoma, explains that not all sins are of the same severity. Some are resolved by a mere desire or statement of teshuva, while others require the passing of Yom Kippur day, and the more severe sins require Yom Kippur day in addition to having to face great difficulties in life.

However, any sin, severe or light, that also creates a “chilul HaShem” (disgracing the holy name of HaShem) can be atoned for only by the death of the sinner.

Prayers recited by Jews in the galut for teshuva and forgiveness are less than meaningless; they are a derogation of the holy name. It makes no difference if the prayers are held in a modern Orthodox synagogue (where the rabbi is orthodox and the congregation is modern), or in the packed batei midrashim of the Grand Rabbis or leading yeshivot; one cannot entertain the ideas of teshuva in the galut.

The reader would be justified in challenging my words in the face of so many spiritual giants in the galut, were it not for the words of the Prophet Yechezkel in chapter 36:

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“Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they defiled it by their conduct and their actions... .

So, I poured out my wrath on them because they had shed blood in the land and because they had defiled it with their idols.

I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions.

And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, 'These are the LORD's people, and yet they had to leave his land.'

I had concern for my holy name, which the people of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone.

Therefore, say to the Israelites, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone.

I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes'."

In verse 20 the prophet says:

And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, 'These are the LORD's people, and yet they had to leave his land.'

The very presence of a Jew in chutz la'aretz (outside the land of Israel) is per se a chillul HaShem. Every shul, yeshiva and shtiebel there cries out "chillul HaShem."

What can we do with the millions of Jews yet in the galut?

My answer is: do nothing!

For like a precious work of art, Eretz Yisrael is a matter of love. Just as a person cannot be persuaded to love a painting or a piece of music if it does not speak to one's soul, so

too, one who is attached to the galut cannot be convinced to leave and continue his life in HaShem's holy land if love of authentic historic Judaism does not pulsate strongly in his soul.

We today in the holy land are living the words of Yechezkel:

וַיְהִי כִּי אָמַר יְהוָה אֵלֵינוּ וְאֵלֵיכֶם
:וְהָיָה לָכֵן אֲנִי אֵלֵיכֶם

:וְהָיָה לָכֵן אֲנִי אֵלֵיכֶם וְהָיָה לָכֵן אֲנִי אֵלֵיכֶם

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"This is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will resettle your towns, and the ruins will be rebuilt.

The desolate land will be cultivated instead of lying desolate in the sight of all who pass through it.'

They will say, "This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited."

Then the nations around you that remain will know that I the LORD have rebuilt what was destroyed and have replanted what was desolate. I the LORD have spoken, and I will do it."

Gemar chatima tova,

Nachman Kahana

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