

Yom Kippur and Succot 5779

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Rabbi Nachman Kahana

From my forthcoming book "Reflections from Jerusalem"

On Yom Kippur we read the heartbreaking saga of the "ten martyred rabbis".

The Torah teaches that Joseph found his brothers in the Valley of Dotan not far from Shechem. After removing his many-colored cloak, the ten brothers involved in the betrayal lowered Joseph into a pit of snakes and scorpions, before selling him to the Ishmaelites and Midianites as it says, "Yosef followed his brothers and found them at Dotan" (Genesis 37:17).

The "Ten Martyrs" (rabbis cruelly murdered by the Romans), were divinely sentenced to death for the sin of Yosef having been sold 1500 years previously. We weep over the fate that befell these great men and the implications it had for the Jewish People. Yet HaShem's ways are mysterious, and no one can fathom the thoughts of the Creator, whose gaze encompasses all generations from Adam to the last man on earth.

The Mufti of Yerushalayim spent the years of World War Two in Berlin, with his mentor Hitler. The two entered into an agreement: the Mufti would enroll thousands of Moslems from Bosnia and its related areas into the ranks of the SS. In return, the Germans, after conquering Palestine, would construct a major death camp where the Jews of the Middle East

would be sent to their death.

In November 1942, General Rommel was defeated at the battle of El Alamein and the murderous plan was averted.

The site earmarked for the camp was the very same Valley of Dotan cited above.

The death of the Ten Martyrs was an atonement for the sale of Yosef. However, the Mufti and the Germans could never have known that the murder of the Ten Martyrs was sufficient to appease the demands of the quality of Strict Justice, and in our day 2000 years later, calamity was averted in the Valley of Dotan.

The composers of the Yom Kippur liturgy who included the saga of the martyred rabbis did so to teach us that a sin left unrepented is not forgiven even after two millennia. However, the composers could never have known the implications the martyrs' death would have on the Jewish nation 2000 years later, when the sin was eradicated, and the death camp was not constructed in the Valley of Dotan.

Succot – An allegory

Reb Yisrael and his sons erected their sukkah adjacent to the kitchen door of their palatial home in one of the Five Towns, as they had done for many years in the past.

But this year was different. Reb Yisrael had just learned from his rabbi that one of the reasons for residing temporarily in a sukkah is in case one's destiny was decided on Rosh HaShana to be expulsion into galut, the departure from the comforts of home into the sukkah could be considered to be that galut.

Reb Yisrael, his wife and children left the warm comforts of their beautiful home and entered the sukkah with the knowledge that by taking up temporary residence therein, they would be absolved of any galut-related sins.

As the family continued to reside in the sukkah, they got so used to the pleasant smell of the schach (branches used to roof the sukkah) and the pretty pictures on the walls and the overhanging decorations, that they decided to remain there even after the chag! Even though they were able to peer into their permanent home with its luxurious amenities, electrical gadgets, and state-of-the-art under-floor heating units, thick hanging drapes, lush carpets and much more, they showed no interest in returning there.

As odd as it may seem, the family became accustomed to the crowded, cold interior of the sukkah. Their relatives and neighbors tried to point out the irrationality of what they were doing, but the very idea that this was galut did little to encourage the family to return home.



When their rabbi came to visit, it was surprising that he encouraged them to remain in the sukkah rather than to return home; because it was in the sukkah that the family felt comfortable and closely knit.

In the meantime, several strangers noticed that the previously brightly-lit home was vacant, and they decided to move in as if it was indeed their own!

Reb Yisrael and his wife and children saw the strangers living in the house; but in veneration for the sukkah, they stubbornly bonded with the thin walls and dried-out schach and refused to leave.

The whole thing was so absurd. To leave such a beautiful home for the feeble, fallible construction of the sukkah, despite the fact that their beautiful home was beckoning them to return, was beyond the understanding of any rational person.

Then came the stones thrown by the local anti-Semites who wanted to rid the neighborhood of this sukkah eyesore. Reb Yisrael and his family dodged them one by one and steadfastly remained in their fragile dwelling, rationalizing these acts as irrelevant nuisances.

Then came the terrible night when one-third of the sukkah was torched by the local bullies.

Reb Yisrael and his family were aware of what was happening, but their minds had become so warped that no amount of reasoning could move them.

To them the sukkah was home and their home was galut.

Eventually the sukkah came crashing down, killing Reb Yisrael and his entire family in their beloved galut!

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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