



Parashat Shoftim 5771 - #201

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On the Parashah...

Gimmel Elul – Yahrtzeit of Maran Ha-Rav Kook - Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook: “I am building a Nation”

When our master, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook arrived in Israel, Rabbi David Ha-Cohen, the Nazir, walked all night from Jerusalem to Hevron to greet him. While there, he heard a Torah lecture from him. Following the lecture, he said to Rav Kook, “Based on your lecture, your views resemble those of Chabad.” Rav Kook smiled and responded, “I’m building a Nation.”

The Talmud teaches (Sanhedrin 38b), “Each generation and its scholars, each generation and its sages.” G-d’s conduct of each generation is different, and He sends the generation’s spiritual leadership accordingly (Even Sheleima 11:9). The Torah encompasses all generations from start to finish, all questions and all situations. Every generation has a unique divine emissary to uncover another part of the Torah that was previously hidden away, and known only to the most spiritual elite who transcend the generations and time, subsuming everything within their all-encompassing gaze.

Rabbi Hillel Zeitlin wrote an article entitled, “Rav Kook’s Fundamental Approach to the Kabbalah” [in Hebrew], in which he compares the Kabbalah of the Ari, of the Ba’al Shem Tov, of Chabad [Lubavitch] and of Rav Kook. Our Rabbi, Rav Tzvi Yehudah, said that this article was generally accurate and that it hit the mark, but he added that the Kabbalah of the Vilna Gaon must be included as well.

Rav Zeitlin said that the Ari spoke about the divine light in the spiritual worlds. The Ba’al Shem Tov, and in his wake, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe (in his book the Tanya), brought that light down to man. Rav Tzvi Yehudah added that the Vilna Gaon uncovered the divine light within the Torah. Finally, Rav Kook uncovered the divine light within the Nation (Sifran Shel Yechidim, page 235).

These divine lights are obviously all connected. All of these elite figures gazed at the whole picture, but each from a different perspective. Imagine several people watching the stars from a tall tower, but each gazing at them from a unique spot within that tower (ibid., p. 236).

During the past hundred years an amazing thing has happened: the gathering of the exiles has begun. In the Shemoneh Esreh we pray, “Sound the great shofar for our freedom. Lift up the banner to bring our exiles together.” It is happening! Someone once told me, “When my great, great grandfather was born, there were 12,000 Jews in Israel. When my great grandfather was born, there were 30,000. When my grandfather was born there were 80,000, when my father was born there were 200,000, and when I was born there were 600,000. When my son was born there were two million, and when my grandson was born there were five million!”

Yet the ingathering of the exiles does not just mean a population transfer from one geographic place to another. We are gathering together and becoming a single nation once more. From scattered individuals, from a scattered, divided people, we are once more becoming the

people described in Divrei Ha-Yamim 1 17:21: “Who is like Your People Israel, a cohesive Nation in the Land.” Maharal at the start of his work Netzach Yisrael explains that there are three characteristics to a healthy, normal people: their unity, their possessing a common land, and their being independent. In practical terms this translates as their possessing a sovereign state, an army and a government with all of its institutions. Slowly, our recognition, understanding and faith that we are a people and that we need to lead the lives of a people is returning to us. For a hundred years already we have been awakening. Yet there are many more Jews who are still in a deep sleep - both in the exile and in Israel. There are also many religious Jews who have not yet understood what a nation is, but we are nevertheless progressing. We are being carried along on the wings of an enormous movement, the Zionist movement. Rav Kook said (Orot 38): “In the end of days, a clandestine organization full of potential and yearning, fraught with internal contradictions, replete with light and darkness is calculating how to penetrate the coast for the salvation of Israel.”

Therefore, many religious Jews see the darkness and reject Zionism. By contrast, many secular Jews see the light and identify with it. Rav Kook emerged, saw the light and the darkness together, and he said, “I am building a Nation,” by which he meant that he was magnifying the light in order to banish the darkness. Rav Kook wrote about himself, “I know that G-d sent me to the holy land to revitalize it” (Igrot vol. 1, p. 189) – to invest spirit in the national rebirth, or, more precisely, to uncover the soul of the national rebirth. Rav Kook further writes about himself: “I am slave who has been sold to the masses, to toil and bear burdens. I have been sold to G-d’s people, who are starting to strike roots in the land of their inheritance, hoping for redemption.” (ibid., pp. 239-240). This is an enormous project, a Torah project, what Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah called “the redemptive Torah” (Or Le-Netivotai, p. 280), the Torah that teaches us how to construct the redemption of our people based on the word of G-d.

To build a single person is an enormous project, but to build a nation is infinitely harder and more complex. Towards that end Rav Kook was sent: “I am building a Nation.” Let us not think that he was not also building the individual Jew. He was involved in that even more. In order for all the individual Jews to be part of the national edifice and not just a collection of isolated individuals, each Jew has to be much more full of Torah and Mishnah, Gemara and Shulchan Aruch, the fear of G-d and good character, holiness and purity, Mesilat Yesharim and Chovot Ha-Levavot.

No less than this, the Nation’s rebirth has also to be a rebirth of individuals, such that all should be on a high level. As Rav Kook wrote: “Unless the national rebirth sheds new light on prayer, Torah, Mussar and faith, it will not yet constitute a true rebirth” (Ma’amarei HaRe’eyah, p. 414).

This is the divine mission of Rav Kook – to transform our national rebirth into a true rebirth, and thank G-d, for the past hundred years, it has been growing more and more genuine thanks to the light and insight contained in Rav Kook’s writings. Yet we still have a long way ahead of us. We have much more to learn of his writings, and much more to teach, in order to uncover the light stored away in our rebirth, until we will see the complete fulfillment of Rav Kook’s vision [written before there was a State of Israel]: “The [future] Jewish state is the foundation of G-d’s throne in the world, and its entire purpose is to render G-d one and His name one” (Orot, page 160).

Rav Aviner on... The Tears of the Oppressed

["Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah" – Re'eh 5771 Translated by R. Blumberg]

Question: Many times I have encountered poor, suffering people, and my heart bleeds for them. I'm not talking here about those who suffer from injustices committed against them by evil people, but about those born with impediments that torment them. I am filled with resentment and anger over this. Why do these people deserve such suffering? I know I cannot receive an answer to this, but this is not my question. Rather I want to know if the very emotion I feel is legitimate. People have told me that it shows a lack of faith. After all, "G-d is good to all, and His mercy is over all His works" (Tehillim 145:9). If so, how dare I complain! Rather, I should remain silent and accept everything.

I do not understand this argument. Is it natural for me to complacently observe my fellowman's suffering without feeling any resentment? Have I no heart? Have I no feelings?

Answer: Your feelings are justified and do not, G-d forbid, constitute heresy. Rather, they result from your honesty. King Solomon wrote long ago about the "tears of the oppressed" (Kohelet 4:1), and in the Zohar commentary, "Saba DeMishpatim" (Shemot 113:1), a very weighty claim is advanced for various types of oppressed people. Obviously, "The deeds of the Mighty One are perfect, for all His ways are just. He is a faithful G-d, never unfair" (Devarim 32:4). Yet since we do not understand the secrets of His behavior – "For My plans are not your plans" (Yeshayahu 55:8) – it is permissible for those oppressed people to weep.

Following is the Zohar: "Behold, the tears of the oppressed' – all of the oppressed pour out tears, stating their case before G-d." The Zohar elaborates on various types of oppressed people:

1. A boy thirteen-years-old and one day, sentenced to death in Rabbinic court for his sins, despite his being considered an adult for only one day, making him like a one-day-old infant. Despite his newness as an adult, the court can theoretically execute him. We will not pause to analyze this example. Rather, let us suffice with the Zohar's conclusion: "Here are the tears of those oppressed. They have no comforter."

2. A person who is classified as a "mamzer", the product of an incestuous relationship. Such a person is outside of the fold. He cannot wed, although he certainly is not guilty for his parents' sin. He is poor and unfortunate. He pours out his tears before G-d and complains, "Master-of-the-Universe! If my parents sinned, what sin did I commit? Surely my own deeds are reputable." Of him it says, "Here are the tears of the oppressed. They have no comforter." In other words, there is no answer to his argument, and there is no comforter and there is no one who can say a word in response.

3. There are other oppressed people, and they are infants who died in their mothers' arms, causing all mankind to shed tears for them. There are no tears more heartfelt than those, for all mankind wonder to themselves, "G-d's justice is the truth, and it follows the path of truth, and here you have these poor infants who didn't sin. Why did they die? Where is the truth in G-d's justice here? Certainly they have no comforter."

As noted, at first we know that G-d's judgments are truth, but we do not understand why, and we cannot sense why. Therefore, there is no comfort for our tears. In the future, however, we will understand, and we will have comfort.

The World-to-Come is not like this world. In this world, we say "Blessed is He who is good and benevolent" over good news, and "Blessed is the true Judge" over bad news. In the World-to-Come, however, we will say "Blessed is He who is good and benevolent" even about bad news (Pesachim 50a).

Yet in the meantime, we are in this world. We do not understand and we cannot intuit the truth. We have complaints about the tears of the oppressed, and we have no answer. And we believe in G-d, and we love Him and cling to Him.

Family Matters - Ha-Rav writes weekly for

the parashah sheet "Rosh Yehudi" on family relationships

Overall Good Atmosphere

If parents are educating their child well and are dedicated, and there are different, unsolvable problems, this is not horrible. The child will solve them with his own strengths. This is part of his spiritual health.

To what is this similar? It is impossible to keep a child in a completely germ-free, sterile environment. This would in fact be dangerous, since his body would have no experience fighting against the germs. The first germ would knock him out! One should therefore not panic that he is breathing in millions of germs every moment. As long as he is healthy, he learns to overcome them.

But if a child is emotionally destroyed because his parents are cold and critical, constantly pointing things out to him and insulting him, or making him feel unwanted, then his state is shaky and there will be a constant risk against any difficulty he faces.

A parent with a good heart, even who sometimes gets angry or makes errors, has not made a fatal mistake. The deciding factor in the child's well-being is having an overall good atmosphere.

Special thank you to Orly Tzion for editing the Ateret Yerushalayim Parashah Sheet



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