



Parashat Tazria-Metzora 5772 - #229

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On Yom Ha-Shoah... You Shall Surely Remember the Holocaust

Traveling to the death camps in Poland is, quite simply, not a good thing to do. Any one of the following reasons should be sufficient to deter a person from doing so.

1. It is forbidden to leave Israel, unless one is: 1. Going on a temporary trip necessary to earning a living 2. marrying, or 3. performing a mitzvah. Visiting a death camp is not considered to be as a mitzvah, whether of the Torah or of our Sages. And is not mentioned amongst the hundreds of thousands of paragraphs found in halachic works that were written in recent generations.

2. One should not financially support the Poles, who collaborated with the Nazis in establishing the extermination camps, and even persecuted the Jews themselves many times. Shall murderers benefit from their deeds?

3. The trip is so expensive that often times only the wealthy students can afford to go on it. It is scandalous that something associated with the educational system should create a division between rich and poor.

Now one might say: If this is true, how should we remember the Holocaust? The answer is simple: books, pictures, films, Yad Vashem and similar places. One might

also say: That's all well and good, but I'll miss out on the experience of a live visit to a death camp. The answer is simple: Hold a live meeting with one of the Holocaust survivors, of which there are presently 87,000, and hear directly from him what he experienced.

Still again, one might argue: "But visiting a death camp is an infinitely more powerful experience than talking to a Holocaust survivor." That argument is truly puzzling. Is an experience with inanimate objects really more powerful than one involving a living, breathing person?! Quite the contrary. Common sense and untainted morality dictate that all of the money spent on this trip should instead be donated to Holocaust survivors, who still suffering, to this very day, from the terrible open wounds to their bodies and souls.

It's true that many of them were successfully absorbed in our country and became its builders, but many others are still suffering. Our country does a tremendous amount for these survivors, but it has not succeeded in solving all of their problems. The State Comptroller's report from 2007 in fact found fault with the way survivors are dealt with. And even though, since then, their situation has vastly improved, there are still many who suffer from a lack of food and medical services.

In sum, despite the State's prodigious assistance, we have not succeeded in answering all of the survivors' needs, especially since the Law of Assistance to Holocaust Survivors applies only to those who arrived in Israel before 5713. It's obvious that some of those who came afterwards are also suffering greatly.

But getting back to our topic: traveling to the death camps to remember what Amalek did to us there, while at the same time neglecting the Holocaust victims who live in our midst.

If someone claims that this involves no small measure of hypocrisy, he will not be entirely mistaken. If someone is shocked by a person who prefers spending his money on an important "death-camp experience," rather than assisting someone who was hurt there, and thereby performing a human kindness, he is not entirely mistaken either.

So here are several practical suggestions:

1. Cancel the Poland trips and give all the money to organizations that grant assistance and support to Holocaust survivors. There are many such organizations, and you can find them by yourself. That's far less complicated than all of the logistics of traveling abroad. I would like to mention one worthy organization that distributes free medicines to the poor, including many Holocaust survivors: "Chaverim LiTerufa" [Friends for Medicine].
2. Even if one does go to Poland, he should make sure that fifty-one percent of his expenses go to helping the victims themselves. This would allow one to argue that most of the funds are going to actual people, rather than to stones and rocks.
3. And even if this suggestion is rejected, then at the very least, ten percent of one's total expenses from the trip should be invested in those suffering terribly to this very day, as a sort of 'Ma'aser', a tithe. That would at least render us a little bit innocent before G-d and man.

"Look to the Rock from whence you were hewn" (Yeshayahu 51:1).

Rav Aviner on...

What is our task on Earth?

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – translated by R. Blumberg]

Question: What is our task on Earth? What do we need to do?

Answer: That is the ultimate question. And the answer is simple: We are here in the world to serve the Master-of-the-Universe. To magnify His glory in the world.

Whatever a person does, however important his activities and however great his talents, they are nothing compared to his ultimate enterprise: being a partner with G-d in the Creation Act, in the great task of making G-d's glory appear on earth. This is what affords man's life its greatest significance, its greatest glory, its greatest success.

So how does one accomplish this? Maharal explains in his "Tiferet Yisrael" (Chapter 3) that man is special compared to everything else in the universe.

The "supreme beings" [Elyonim], i.e., the angels and the celestial sphere and the heavens, are pure and holy, both potentially and practically. The "earthly beings" [Tachtonim], i.e., matter and flora and fauna, are inferior in potential and in practical terms, and will never change, just as the supreme beings will never change. Man, however, is special. He is composed of both the supreme and the earthly, of soul and body. More precisely, he is in practical terms an earthly being, but in potential a supreme being. In order to transform his supremacy from a potential to a practical state, he needs toil.

"Man is born for toil" (Iyov 5:7). This is to say: toiling in Torah (Sanhedrin 99b). Man is born for toil, toil in Torah and toil in Mitzvah observance. The Mitzvot hallow man, as we say in our blessings, "Blessed be G-d... who has sanctified us with His Mitzvot". The Mitzvot transform man from an earthly being into a celestial being, and that is man's task. G-d created man to turn him into a celestial being.

Our Sages say, "G-d desired to have an earthly abode" (Tanchuma Naso 16, explained in Sefer HaTanya 36), meaning: an abode within earthly man, an abode within man's deeds, man's character, man's thoughts, man's emotions and man's pleasures. That is the great goal, "to take pleasure in G-d". This is explained at the beginning of Mesilat Yesharim: man can become so holy that he takes pleasure in G-d. The greatest source of pleasure is not in this world, but in the World-to-Come. Yet when a person reaches the level of "Chasidut", saintliness, as described in Mesilat Yesharim, by then he has already acquired a certain measure of taking pleasure in G-d.

Indeed, Mesilat Yesharim is a ladder set on earth with its head reaching the heavens, explaining how man can become a supreme being, and how he can become more than what he is. Idolatry says: "Be what you are." But we say, "Be more than what you are". More and more, all the time. "There are higher and higher levels, with even higher ones beyond" (Kohelet 5:7). Yet the higher levels above us are not alien to us. They are within us.

They exist in us in potential. They are in our soul.

That is our task – to be partners with G-d in this great work, each person in accordance with his strengths, each in accordance with his efforts and each in accordance with his current spiritual level.

Stories of Rabbenu –

Our Rabbi, Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook

Our Rabbi & Yom Ha-Shoah

Once when our Rabbi mentioned the Holocaust he burst out in tears: "And what did it matter to the wicked one that Rabbi Menachem Zemba was alive?! And that Rabbi Hillel Zeitlin was alive?! (Gadol Shimusha p. 46)

In preparation for Yom Ha-Shoah, a Rabbi in a yeshiva for younger students brought a film to show the students. The film included pictures which were shot by the evil ones during the Holocaust. There were those who sharply criticized the use of this medium to influence the students. When our Rabbi was asked about this matter, he responded that one must deepen awareness of the Holocaust in every possible way. (Gadol Shimusha p. 80)

Our Rabbi said that it would have been appropriate to lay Eichman down on the ground and to have all of Israel step on him and trample him.

Someone once came to pick up our Rabbi in a Volkswagen. He refused to enter (Ha-Rav David Goldenberg).

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



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