



Parashat Tazria-Metzora - #277

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Why was Yom Ha-Atzmaut established on the Fifth of Iyar?

[Sefer Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah vol. 1 #110]

Periods of great suffering are followed by periods of great wonders. And as is known, the quality of goodness is greater than the quality of punishment. The prophet Michah (7:15) says, "As the days of your coming out of the Land of Egypt, I will show him wonders" (Micah 7:15). The Netziv (Rav Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin - Rosh Yeshiva of the famed Volozhin Yeshiva) explains that the incredible suffering experienced during the slavery in Egypt was followed by great miracles during the Exodus. In our generation, we have seen greater suffering than in Egypt, and we will therefore certainly see greater miracles. We have already seen so many miracles with our own eyes.

Before the declaration of the State of Israel, the Americans warned us against declaring independence. How, they asked, will 600,000 Jews stand against a million and a half Arabs who were armed with English weaponry, and were aided by the armies of seven Arab countries? The Americans also informed us from the outset that they would not recognize the State of Israel. The American Consul departed from our Land saying: I cannot watch the liquidation of the Jewish settlement. Even the Zionists of America were steadfast in their opposition to the declaration of the State. The leaders of the Jewish settlement too feared a great "slaughter of the Jews," and were in doubt. Some of them reasoned that it was forbidden to endanger the entire settlement. In the end, the decision fell to the People's Administration (Minhelet Ha-Am, which preceded the Government of Israel). The vote was decided by a razor-thin margin: six to four. Soon thereafter, a chain of miracles began.

Approximately one million Arabs fled of their own volition from the Land of Israel, leaving room for a million Jews who soon arrived. In his article "The Revival of the

Land and its Wonders," Moshe Prager examined the wonder of the flight of the Arabs at the time of the establishment of the State in light of the verse: "I will make the Land desolate" (Vayikra 26:32). There is no logical explanation for this strange phenomenon. Have you ever in your life seen that he who was rooted in his land for hundreds of years would suddenly uproot himself from the source of his land, lifting up his feet and fleeing in any direction that the wind would blow? Nearly half of the Arab population abandoned everything and fled in abandon, like chaff driven away by the wind (quoted in Rav Menachem Kasher in the book "Ha-Tekufah Ha-Gedolah," p. 40). Take for example, the Arabs in Tzefat and its vicinity: they had many weapons and had prepared to slaughter the Jewish citizens of the city. The Jews did not know where to flee. They sent a delegation to the Arabs to speak to their hearts and to offer them great amounts of money to alter their evils plans, but it was of no use. So what happened? There was a small post of the Haganah in Tzefat whose only hope was the "Davidka" – an improvised cannon. They didn't even know if it would succeed in shooting or would just explode in place. With the kindness of Hashem, the cannon shell came out with a powerful thunder and hit the enemy position. At that very moment a huge gap appeared in the sky and a torrential downpour began (a rare occurrence in the month of Iyar, which falls in Spring). When people arrived in Tzefat, they could not find a living soul, just as in the famous story in the Tanach about the four men stricken with the spiritual disease of tzara'at (see Melachim 2 chap. 7). In the end, the secret was revealed: everyone had fled. The few who remained in the hospital explained what had happened: the leaders of the Arabs believed that the Jews had an atomic bomb, and the frightful sound of the "Davidka" together with the uncommon rainstorm was seen as a sign that they had dropped it.

There are those who ask why Yom Ha-Atzmaut was established on the 5th of Iyar in particular, since no miracle occurred on that day. The Jewish State was declared, and with it a life-threatening situation began (Chanukah and Purim were established on the day after the "war" ended). Our Rabbi, Rav Tzvi Yehudah Ha-Cohain Kook, explains that the courage to declare the State is the miracle of miracles, the soul and root of all of the miracles and wonders (Le-Netivot Yisrael vol. 1, p. 179). The Talmud discusses a shepherd who abandoned his flock, leaving it prey to either a wolf or a lion who came and tore it to pieces. The Rabbis established that the shepherd's responsibility for the slaughter depends on whether or not he would have been able to save the animals. If he would not have been able to overcome the attacking animal, he is exempt from all payment. The Talmud asks: Why is this so? Perhaps it would have happened as for David: "Your servant slew both the lion and the bear" (Shmuel 1 17:36)? Perhaps a minor miracle would have occurred (Baba Metzia 106a)? The Tosafot describe the miracle: "A spirit of courage and the knowledge to wage war" (Tosafot ibid.). So too in the matter of the declaration of the State: "The awakening, the exerting of effort, the philosophizing and the strengthening for the drive to rescue and revive," is a miracle from the Heavens, "with a supreme and inner stimulus of power." The fact that the Nation of Israel was filled with the spirit to fight and the knowledge to wage war is the foundation of all miracles (Le-Netivot Yisrael ibid.).

From this act flowed all of the miracles which led to the establishment and strengthening of the State of Israel.

We are fortunate to have witnessed all of these miracles and to witness Hashem's miracles every day. In His great kindness, Hashem will show us more wonders in the future.

Rav Aviner on...

A Chief Rabbi Vis-à-vis the Diaspora Rabbinate

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Tazria-Metzora 5773 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Question (The questioner is a Rabbi in America who belongs to the R.C.A.): I saw on the Internet the conference at Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim about selecting a Chief Rabbi. Do you think the Diaspora Rabbinate should be involved in these elections, or that it is an internal matter of the Rabbis of Eretz Yisrael?

Answer: No offense intended, but this is an internal matter of the Rabbis of the State of Israel, for the Chief Rabbi is the Mara De-Atra [leading Rabbinic authority] of the Land of Israel, who we are obligated to obey. There are many Rabbis amongst the Jewish People with many opinions, but the Mara De-Atra of the city or of the country is the one who has the deciding vote over everyone else. Thus, Ha-Rav Ha-Gaon Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Herzog ztz"l would print on his stationary, "Head of the Rabbis of Eretz Yisrael". The Rabbis of Eretz Yisrael choose a Rabbi whom they wish to heed. And since the Rabbis of America, with all due respect, have no reason to listen to the Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael – no complaint intended – seemingly they have no need to involve themselves in his selection.

A parallel, but distinct, paradigm applies to the secular. They, too, have no reason to be involved in choosing the Chief Rabbi, because they do not intend to heed him. Quite the contrary: they want him to listen to them, i.e. for the Chief Rabbi to be subject to public opinion -- which itself is a new kind of idolatry. As Ha-Rav Ha-Gaon Yosef Dov Soloveitchik ztz"l would call it (Divrei Ha-Rav, p. 87), the idolatrous worship of public opinion. The Rabbi does not have to be indentured to public opinion. Rather, the public has to listen to the Rabbi, let alone to the Chief Rabbi. And since the secular have no intention of listening to the Chief Rabbi, but want him to listen to them, they cannot make the selection. Bearing in mind all the differences, the same applies regarding the Rabbis of America.

Yet that isn't precisely the case. Ultimately, the State of Israel is the center of world Jewry, and what occurs there has ramifications for what happens in America as well. That does not mean that the Rabbis of America can choose who will be the Chief Rabbi of Israel, but they are entitled to express their opinion, and the Rabbis of the Land of Israel will decide to what extent to take their opinion into account.

And just as you heard at the conference, Ha-Rav Ha-Gaon Simcha Ha-Cohain Kook Shlit"a spoke at length about conversion. Conversion is a central point, and we have to stand guard on that score when it comes to choosing a Chief Rabbi. That indeed is the most difficult point for the secular public, because in Israel there are hundreds of thousands of immigrants from the Soviet Union who are non-Jews. That creates a difficult situation, so there are some who suggest conversion without undertaking mitzvah observance, which is exactly what the secular want. Ha-Rav Simcha Ha-Cohain Kook emphasized that that is impossible, and that it certainly opposes the view of Maran Ha-Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Cohain Kook, who founded the Chief Rabbinate. Moreover, G-d forbid that someone should say things like that in his name, for a Chief Rabbi of Israel certainly cannot take that view. He pointed out that the most important thing in conversion is: "I am Hashem, your G-d" (Shemot 20). Indeed, in order to convert, it is not enough to be part of the Jewish People. Rather as Rut said, "Your people are my people and your G-d is my G-d" (Rut 1:16). The struggle over conversion certainly exists in America, and one must stand guard to ensure that the parameters are not

breached, that all conversions include undertaking the yoke of Mitzvot, and, obviously, that they not be performed through the Conservatives or the Reform, but only through the Orthodox and the God-fearing. If - G-d forbid - those parameters of conversion were to be breached, it would also have harsh repercussions for American Jewry.

The Chief Rabbi of Israel has to be a spiritual leader who lays out an elevated path, and not just a clerk. As is well-known, Rav Soloveitchik said that he was not interested in being the Chief Rabbi, because he held that a Chief Rabbi is a clerk, and he did not want to be a clerk, but to learn Torah and to spread Torah (Divrei Ha- Rav p. 196).

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Sneezing in Halachah

Sneezing during Shemoneh Esrei

Q: If someone sneezes in the middle of Shemoneh Esrei, should one interrupt to say "Liberiyot"?

A: Certainly not, since it is forbidden to interrupt the Shemoneh Esrei. The Gemara says that "One who sneezes during Shemoneh Esrei - it is a good omen for him, for just as they give satisfaction below (i.e. in this world, because sneezing offers relief - Rashi), so do they give him satisfaction above (i.e. in Heaven)" (Berachot 24a-b, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 103:3. And Rashi explains that this teaching was so important to Rabbi Zeira because he sneezed quite often. And in Shut Kol Menachem – Orach Chaim 1:91 – the Kaliver Rebbe explains that this may be the source for those who distribute snuff in Shul during davening so they will sneeze. Nonetheless, Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievski says that if possible, one should prevent himself from sneezing in the middle of Shemoneh Esrei. She'eilat Rav, vol. 1 p. 120. But it seems that this idea needs to be investigated).

During "Avot" or All Shemoneh Esrei

Q: When the Gemara says that "One who sneezes during Shemoneh Esrei - it is a good omen for him, for just as they give satisfaction below, so do they give him satisfaction above", is this only during "Avot" (the first blessing) or the entire Shemoneh Esrei?

A: The entire Shemoneh Esrei (And this is also the ruling of Ha-Rav Chaim Kanievski. Gam Ani Odecha vol. 3, p. 4).

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