

DOING OUR PART

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

This week's Rabbi's Notebook was first published for the Shaarey Zedek community in North Hollywood, California on Aug 10, 2001 - 21 Menachem Av 5761 following the bombing of the Subaru Pizza shop in Yerushalayim and the death of Shoshana Hayman Greenbaum HYD.

B"H things in Eretz Yisroel appear to be quieter; however, we must not trust the intents of adversaries whose sole desire is our destruction. As Ami the Taxi driver told me two weeks ago while I was visiting Yerushalayim with members of my congregation, "Every day there is quiet is a gift from G-d!" May it be His will that the quiet continue.

Doing Our Part

(7:16) "...Your eye shall not feel any mercy for them-so that you will not serve their gods-for this is a trap for you."

"These repeated admonitions not to show any mercy to the Canaanite population may demonstrate how little such behavior normally accords with the character and the purpose of the Jewish people. The tendency of the Jewish people is, and always should be, to show mercy to all living things, and the Jewish people should view such merciless conduct against the Canaanite population as an exception, explicitly commanded by G-d and necessitated by the special circumstances described in the text." (Rav S.R. Hirsch)

We Jews claim to have three identifying characteristics: merciful, modest, and doers of kind deeds. For the most part, you will never hear that repeated in the media. It is a statement that we make about ourselves; however, there is no doubt that the rest of the world expects us to behave as merciful, modest, doers of kind deeds even if they do not expect the same of themselves. Be certain that they will never openly admit to having one standard for us and a lesser standard for themselves.

As a simple illustration consider the expression, "cycle of violence." The massacre in the heart of Yerushalayim was one more episode in the "cycle of violence." It is an expression that conveys, "shared fault." It is an expression that suggests, "Be bigger than your 'partners in peace'." Take the moral high road. Trust that it is a "cycle" and that it takes two to fight." It is an expression that proclaims loudly for all who care to hear, "The Jews are a nation that dwells alone and are not to be judged by the standards of the other nations. We must demand that the Jews be "merciful, modest, and doers of kind deeds even if we are not!"

The double standard is emotionally very difficult for us to accept, and the fact that their expectations for us is as great a compliment as it is a lack of fairness does not make it any easier to handle. It has never been, and it continues not to be, an easy designation for us to bear.

The events of the past few days have been devastating. The situation in Eretz Yisroel has been growing increasingly intolerable with seemingly no end or resolution in sight. However, the massacre in Yerushalayim and the murder of Shoshana Hayman Greenburg have left me, and I believe that my feelings are shared by most of you, reeling in painful anger and confusion.

I believe, as I presented on Tisha B'Av, that our present challenge is to strengthen our trust in G-d and His ever-present benevolence. When there are no apparent options or solutions we are forced to accept the impotence of our limited intelligence and resources. We must turn to G-d and throw ourselves upon His mercy. However, doing so presumes that we are prepared to do our part in our "covenant with G-d."

Let's be honest with ourselves. Read this week's Parsha in light of yesterday's events. Go to the shiva house on Mansfield and cry with the Hayman's as they mourn the death of their child and their dreams. Do not simply read the verses! As you read the Parsha let your hearts open up to the promise of G-d's loving protection and ask ourselves if we are keeping to our side of the bargain.

G-d never asks for perfection. G-d never expects perfection. G-d simply desires to have an ongoing relationship with His children. Like all relationships there are ups and downs. There are mistakes and there is forgiveness. However, the one thing there cannot be is indifference. There must be a desire to confront the truth and continue growing. When it comes to Israel we cannot be indifferent. It is not only happening to "them." It is happening to us!

Please understand that I put the challenge to you but in truth I question myself. Are we true believers? Are we prepared to accept the conditions for having an ongoing ever growing and developing relationship with the Creator? Are we prepared to love G-d with the same commitment and obligation that we expect of others? Are we prepared to accept His ever-confounding yet loving judgment, even when He takes away the very best from among us?

This is the challenge of today. This is the challenge of tomorrow. We stand on the threshold of true redemption. We are witness to the revealed glory of G-d's majesty and the fulfillment of prophecies. Are we prepared to do what we must do? Are we prepared to do the will of G-d?

(Divarim 11:22-25) "For if you will keep..this commandment that I command you.. to love G-d.. to walk in all His ways and to hold fast to Him. G-d will drive away all these people before you...Every place that you feet will tread shall become yours.. Your G-d will place the fear and the dread of you upon all the land.. even as He has spoken to you."

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