

AT PEACE WITH ITSELF

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

(4:6-10) "...For that is your wisdom and understanding before the eyes of the nations that will hear all these statutes and will say, "So it is, after all, a wise and understanding nation... Only take heed...so that you do not forget the facts that your own eyes have seen... and make them known your children and your children's children... The day that you stood before G-d at Chorev (Mt. Sinai)

The children are the key. The telling is the means.

G-d promised Avraham Avinu that the "families of the earth would be blessed through him and his children." How exactly was that supposed to happen? How was a miniscule family supposed to become the source of blessing / influence for the entire world?

Actions speak louder than words. Divinely orchestrated circumstances in conjunction with our own behavior have placed us in the spot light. At first it was the land of Israel. Bridging three continents, it was inevitable that merchants and armies would seek to traverse the land in pursuit of commerce and grandeur. Assuming the ongoing protection of G-d, assuming Israel's continued adherence to His commands, the rest of the world would encounter a nation at peace with itself. Prosperity would flourish, scholarship would be self-evident, a defending army would be unnecessary, and the family would clearly be the cornerstone of the nation's enviable success. Visitors would come, see, ask, and wonder if they could not do the same. Upon leaving, we would encourage them to take with them something of the values they had witnessed that might benefit their families and societies.

In time, the fame would spread that a utopian society does exist. Some would be encouraged to seek us out and see for themselves this wise and understanding people. Others would write it off as the stuff of fantasy and fools. At best they would think that if it did exist it was because of the primitive and simplistic expectations of its citizens. There was no way that a sophisticated, educated, and modern society could accomplish being at peace with itself! Others would be far less gracious. Disbelief, anger, and the desire to destroy that which they fear and do not understand would rear its ugly head. However, because we would be committed to G-d's Mitzvos, the guarantee of Divine protection would be absolute. As the enemy would draw near they too would be overwhelmed by the majesty of the Jewish people living in the land of Israel in accordance to the dictates of G-d. They too would soon crave understanding, wisdom, and peace.

In last week's Parsha Moshe instructed the Bnai Yisroel that they would have to take possession of the land. He also enjoined them not to fear the 31 city-states occupying Eretz Yisroel. "Do not fear

them! It will be G-d Who wages war for you!"

Have you ever seen a mother cat take on a dog 20 times its size? The absolute fearlessness of a mother protecting her litter is a natural phenomenon intended to protect the species and teach us the meaning of trusting G-d. G-d promised our Forefathers that the land would be ours. G-d even delineated its boundaries so that there would be no mistake which land He intended us to possess. It is incumbent upon us to believe fully that the entire land is ours and that G-d desired us to take possession of it. It is incumbent upon us to take possession of the entire land regardless of whatever arguments would suggest differently. It demands that we ignore claims of being indigenous to the land and ignore our tendency toward being merciful and generous. Our obligation to our children, our G-d, and ourselves is to emulate the mother cat and fearlessly protect that which is divinely gifted to us as ours. However, we have to first believe; and if we believe, we should be fearless.

In this week's Parsha Moshe focused the nation on their children. Following the questionable request of the two tribes to dwell apart from the nation, Moshe emphasized that our first and foremost obligation is to instill in our children the pride of being chosen. They take precedent over all else. Gifted into our care for a relatively few short years, it is incumbent upon us that we instill in them, by word and mostly by example, devotion to G-d, commitment for family, and love of Torah. "... Make them known your children and your children's children... The day that you stood before G-d at Chorev (Mt. Sinai)."

Proof of the truth and viability of values is only in the children. What we attempt to hide from the rest of the world is open and revealed to our children. President Lincoln may have quipped that you can fool most of the people most of the time and all the people all the time, but he did not mention the children. You might fool everyone all the time, but not your own children. You can't fool them any of the time. They most always do as they see, and only occasionally as they are told.

Matan Torah (Revelation) was the beginning of purpose. It was the moment when it all began to make sense. The years of slavery and persecution, the miracles of the Exodus and the parting of the sea, the promise of a land flowing with milk and honey, all fit into the frame and focus of 613 commandments. From the mysteries of the Parah Adumah (Red Heifer) to the rational for honoring parents, G-d had gifted them with a lifestyle the sum of which allowed for them to be at peace with themselves and with each other.

However, two generations was not enough to prove truth and viability. Parents and children have issues with each other. How does the child know that his or her parents are teaching the truth? Maybe they are part of a great generational shift and experiment? Maybe they, the children, are the experiment? Therefore, Moshe states, "...Make them known to your children and your children's children... The day that you stood before G-d at Chorev (Mt. Sinai)." Parents are not enough. It takes grandparents to prove the truth. Continuity is best experienced in the embrace and pride of grandparents.

The nations of the world are waiting. They are waiting for us to stand up for who we are and what G-d has given us. They are waiting to see how much we value and believe in our own choseness. They want to know if we truly believe. If we do truly believe, if we cherish our choseness, if we are prepared to fight fearlessly for what is divinely ours, then they too will begin to hope. They too will begin to anticipate a world at peace with itself.

"...For that is your wisdom and understanding before the eyes of the nations that will hear all these statutes and will say, "So it is, after all, a wise and understanding nation..."

15TH OF AV: THE HAPPIEST DAY IN THE YEAR

The last Mishnah in Tanis states that the 15th of Av (this Shabbos) and Yom Kippur are equally joyous occasions. The forgiveness received on Yom Kippur and the annually renewed closeness with G-d are causes for great celebration. The 15th of Av is equally a time of historic atonement, intimacy, and celebration. The Talmud explains the six events that give this day its unique character.

1. As explained in previous editions, the above 20, male, generation of the Exodus died out in the desert during the 40 years of wandering. Every Tisha B'Av, 15,000 men, (of the total 600,000) would die. On the last Tisha B'av in the year 2488, the remaining 15,000 dug their graves, but in the morning none had died! Figuring that they must have made a mistake in the calendar, they continued to dig their graves every night until the 15th, when seeing the full moon they realized that G-d had rescinded the decree for the remaining 15,000! A day of forgiveness and celebration was proclaimed. ($38 \times 15,000 = 555,000 + 14,700 + 250$ by Korach + 15,000 Deut.1:44 = 599,950)

2 & 3. In the times of the Shoftim - Judges, under the rule of Othniel, a terrible civil war broke out between the tribe of Binyamin and the rest of the nation. (approx. 2573-1188 b.c.e.) The tribe of Binyamin was decimated and a decree was issued forbidding any further marriage with the men of Binyamin. This would have resulted in the eventual destruction of the entire tribe. Additionally, all women, from any tribe, were forbidden to marry outside of their tribes. Some time later, on the 15th of Av, both decrees were lifted, allowing for all marriages between the tribes, and guaranteeing the survival of the tribe of Binyamin. The Mishna teaches that the 15th of Av was devoted to shidduchim, marriages, and the rebuilding of relationships.

4. Following the death of King Solomon, the nation was divided. Israel, was led by the evil Yeravam ben Nevat. Three years after taking the throne, he erected two golden calves in the North and South of Israel, and prohibited his people to go and visit the Beis Hamikdash. Checkpoints and other forms of restraint were instituted to discourage going to the Temple and to encourage serving the "golden calves". On the 15th of Av, around 3187-574 b.c.e., under the King Hoshea b. Elah, the decree was lifted and all of Israel was again able to go to the Beis Hamikdash.

5. "Yom Tabar Maagal - The Day of the breaking of the Axes." In the 2nd Temple, wood was scarce after the land had been unattended during the 70- year exile. Therefore, wood was very precious and expensive. To guarantee that the Mizbeach would always have sufficient wood, donations were

given by the wealthiest families, exclusively for the Alter. The wood had to be completely dry to guarantee that there wouldn't be any worms. The cut off date to bring the wood into the Temple for the coming year was the 15th of Av. That was the day when the "axes could be broken" and it was a day of enormous joy and rejoicing knowing that the sacrifices could be brought for the coming year.

6. 52 years after the 2nd Temple, Bar Kochba lead an uprising against the Romans. He was so successful that some considered him to be the Mashiach. His rebellion ended on Tisha B'Av after a 3-year siege against Betar, and he died along with 580,000 others. To disgrace and demoralize the people, the "fallen of Betar" were not permitted by the Roman authorities to be buried, and were stacked as a human fence around the vineyards of the governor, Adrianus. (approx. 12 mile perimeter) For almost 11 years, until Emperor Hadrian's death, the bodies miraculously remained intact, without decomposing. On the 15th of Av, permission was granted to bury the martyred of Betar. This miracle was cause for celebration. In fact, the fourth blessing of the Birkas Hamazon (Grace After Meals) Hatov V'Hamaytiv - G-d Who is good and Who does good) was authored by the rabbis of that generation to commemorate this great miracle. This was ordained to remember the special love that G-d displayed in not allowing the martyrs of Betar to decompose before burial.

Special Edition: Reflections On Disengagement

(the imagery expressed is that of this writer)

Just A Tear

It's never been about buildings and things. It has always been about the land. Years of dirt, sweat, and tears. I buried my wife, son, and grandson here. I planted my fields with blood and prayers. At times the blood was too much and the prayers failed me; yet I stayed because of the land. And that is what they don't seem to get. It's not politics or history or the fact that my family was born and buried here. It's not the pictures I no longer can look at or the memories that never leave. It isn't the quieted voices of children living with a norm that should have never been. It's always been the land. The land is everything. I was formed from it and one day, soon I hope, I will return to it. When that happens they will never be able to take it away from me. We will be what we always were, one and the same.

The prophet said that better I should forget my right hand than forget Jerusalem. He got it right. He understood that it was all about the land. The land is my right hand, the land is everything. They also don't get that here or there it's all the same. Whether in the south or the north, in desert or at the edge of the Kineret, it's the same land and it's all equally mine. Why do they think that giving me what is already mine is a compensation for taking away what is mine. They might as well take my right arm in exchange for leaving me my left. Doesn't sound like such a good deal to me.

I'm not angry - I'm just tired. Sadness does that to you. It reaches deep in side your heart and you

can feel it in your blood. I sure do sigh a lot. Seems like I need the extra breath to keep going. I'll tell you a secret. When it's really bad I go out and stretch out on the ground. I press myself into the grass or sand; it doesn't make a difference, and feel the land. I feel the warmth or the coolness and let it seep inside me. Somehow it chases away my sadness and let's me cry. They say that tears will make rejoicing grow. That too they don't know, but I do. Tears, they are the lifeblood of the land. So many years and so many tears. Not just of sadness or grief. So many of them were joy filled and luscious; but I don't want to think of them - it hurts too much.

The land - it has a life of its own. If you listen carefully you can hear its pulse. It knows that things aren't right. It knows that I will soon leave. It doesn't wonder why because it knows all too well the loneliness of not being loved enough. And that's the part they don't get. They never learned how to love enough or else they could never do this. And I don't mean just the land. I mean they never learned to love anything enough. Once you have loved you know that it is the only way to live. There is no other way. The land knows this and the land is sad.

I have no complaints. G-d may have, but I don't. I've stopped asking the questions that are never answered. I now simply just believe. No, I'm neither a fool or a quitter. When I buried my baby, his father, and his grandmother, I stopped asking. Taking away sticks and stones can't hurt someone who hurts all the time. I, like the land, hurt all the time. And like me it waits. We know that we will all be together sooner or later. No matter what.

Don't get me wrong. I love my life. I've seen things and done things that the angels can never do. I've walked the hills of Judea and the sandy shores of the Great Sea. I've touched the stones of tears and gazed heavenward with questions and requests that angels never have. I've laughed, loved, cried, and wailed. I've tasted the best of this land which words were never intended to describe, and loved those who were given to me to cherish. It has been good and I would do it all over again. But I am tired. So very tired and so very sad.

I also believe in miracles. How can you not when living in this land? And that's also what they don't get. Too many miracles and you forget that there are miracles. Trust me, Kipah or no Kipah, Shabbat or no Shabbat, disco Friday night or Kiddush, they are all the same. They think they are entitled to this land. How little they really know. No one is entitled to this land. It belongs to no one. The second we forget that it is all a gift, we've lost the right to be here. I so fear that many have lost it already. But miracles do happen. I believe.

It's time to go. I won't kiss the land goodbye. Why would I want to hurt it so? I'm not going anywhere. This land is mine and it knows that I love it. For the meantime, take care of my baby. Tell his father and grandmother that I am just going to lie down here for a moment and cry.

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