The Secret Weapon (2024)

(Emor)

Shabbat was Netzach of Netzach, the victory of victory. Netzach also means eternal. What is the essence of our eternal victory? Rav Twersky mentioned to me this week on the Har Habayit that the difference between our Nation and similar peoples like the Black people who were also enslaved, is that we continually pick ourselves up again and rebuild. A true slave constantly dreams of being the taskmaster, while a free man even if enslaved is always free. He mentioned a Rav who had been imprisoned in Russia, and who referred to his time in prison by saying 'there was a time I lived in a place called prison'.

This Shabbat we stood right in the center of the Omer. Twenty-four days behind us and twenty-four days to come (b'h). I mentioned to my Shabbat guest that I feel like I am in the center of a tornado where everything is calm. With wars and tragedies and terrors all around us, as a people we are forced to continue to move ahead into the sea and pray that Hashem will protect us from so many enemies that seek our annihilation. I feel like Miriam. When Miriam played her tambourine in the song by the sea, Chazal ask where she found a tambourine in the rush to leave Egypt? They answer that she took it along in anticipation of salvation.

My Shabbat guest on the other hand did not have the same faith and confidence. He was in a panic as we are being attacked on all fronts and a third of the country has been displaced for over six months. He declares himself an atheist and questions where God was in the Shoa and on Oct 7? I answered him where were you? Why were you protesting every week for nine months to kick God out of Israel? He answered your request and took away His protection for a day. Who is really responsible and what are the consequences of our sanctimonious moral postures that claim to be more moral than God? Who is to blame as we open the gates of the zoo and pontificate to the animals that we are all equal as they dismember us? Excuse the insult to animals.

Even though we disagree on many topics, my old friend comes every week for Shabbat and truly appreciates it. The 'pintele yid' inside enjoys Shabbat and loves his Nation as well. My friend Rav Twersky mentions in defense of many secular Jews who built this country the famous passage in the Torah that the Land itself spits out those it rejects (Vayikra 18:28). If the Land has not spit them out then this is a sign that there are qualities in this person that the Land desires. There is no shortage of religious Jews that the Land has spit out and secular ones that the Land has digested.

I mentioned to my friend that Rav Kahane says that the concept of Kiddush Hashem is based on a line in this week's Parsha.

> 'I shall be sanctified amidst the children of Israel. I am the Lord Who sanctifies you Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to be a God to you. I am the Lord.' (Vayikra 22:32-33)

He brings down Rashi who explains that one observes this mitzva by the following words: 'Give of yourself and Sanctify my name.' The Rav adds that as simple as this or as complex as this is, this is the essence of Judaism. (Kahane in the Parsha- Emor)

I turned to my friend and reminded him of when he went each day to prepare meals for the soldiers. He was giving of himself for the greater good of Am Israel and this sanctifies God's name.

It is interesting to note that in the Shma each day we read

> 'I am the Lord, your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt to be your God.' (Bamidbar 15:41)

The basic concept is that Hashem took us out so that instead of serving Pharoah, we will serve Him. This is what guarantees our freedom. If we stop serving Him, a new Pharoah will arise and we will again be persecuted and enslaved. This week as we have arrived at the center point between leaving Egypt and arriving at Har Sinai, an additional element has been added. We are being sanctified.

With all of the catastrophic events that have happened this year, it really seems to parallel the original exodus. Benzi Gopstein asks why the Torah was not given as soon as we left Egypt. He brings down an answer from Rav Kahane

> Even after physical and national liberation, the people were still unable to be reformed and to accept the perfection of holiness, they needed to advance toward holiness by observing mitzvahs that express concepts, ideas and values and confidence in God, which refine and elevate and uplift the people from the lows of secular nationalism, especially because they are based on faith and trust in God, which are the essence of the manna, [and Miriam's well]. After all, a secular people, like all nations, surely thinks only in national and "realistic" terms. For such a people, only the size of the army and the number of weapons and allies give it its confidence Therefore, after Israel came out of slavery to redemption, and before they came to receive the Torah, the perfection of a holy nation, they had to acquire something that is the foundation and basis of the Torah and that is faith

I related to my guest a story that happened just before Shabbat that to me embodies one of the secrets that builds our faith and resilience and arouses divine assistance. In the morning minyan, we only had seven people and so the gabbai gave up and said, let's pray without a minyan. One congregant said why are we giving up, we have seven already. This encouraged me and I went out like Clark Kent with his Superman costume and caught 3-4 fish and brought them back in five minutes. Two were even secular Jews that the Rabbi assisted with putting tefillin on. Everyone was impressed but to me I was just adding funds to my monthly bus pass. What do I mean?

In the old country I used to help my local Rabbi with the minyan. For years I would stand on the corner and ask people if they were Jewish and ask if they could help us with the minyan. I thought of Israel all the time, however I was told it was very expensive to live there and I never was able to save much. Then one day my brother offered to take me with him on a 2-week trip to Israel. As the last days approached, I wanted so much to stay but wondered how I could manage with hardly any money. As I walked down Dizengoff street in Tel Aviv a Rabbi approached and asked me if I could help him with a minyan. Of course, I answered, this is practically my profession. After davening he told me that he was trying to build a yeshiva and he had rooms in the women's section available if I would stay and learn and help build the minyan. It was a miracle from Heaven that came through the mitzva of the minyan. This is how I made Aliyah.

When there was a problem with the minyan this week, I took this as a reminder from Above that I am here on the condition of the minyan and so I better honor my commitments. To the congregants they were surprised, but to me I was very thankful that my ticket to Israel was renewed. Later in the day I was in a store on Dizengoff and a Rabbi approached me and said he was trying to build a minyan in a Bet Knesset across the road and asked me if I could donate some time during the week to help with their

minyan. What are the chances of that happening, dafka on the same day? I told him my Aliyah story and in fact the original story happened right in front of the store we were standing in, twenty years earlier. What is the message? For me personally I took it as a message from the Hashem that I must not get too comfortable and keep increasing the mitzvas. This is the role of a Jew. 'Give of yourself and Sanctify my name.'

The minyan has a great power that contains within it many secrets that affect our strength as a Nation and our success. A Christian or Bhuddist can sit on a mountain and meditate but for a Jew to pray he needs a minyan. His prayer involves the community. It teaches many lessons.

Lesson of the Minyan

One is asked to volunteer his time so someone can say Kaddish. This is a Kiddush Hashem that affects the congregation and the individual. If there are nine Rosh Yeshivas or nine wealthy powerful Jews and a Jewish hobo sitting outside on a bench, that hobo is needed. Without him those nine have nothing. The hobo also gains self esteem and knows he has value and is needed. How powerful is that lesson? It also teaches faith. Just when you think there is no chance for a minyan, the hour is late, however with a little extra effort suddenly miracles happen. The nucleus of our Nation is made up of minyans of Jews that may or may not get along with each other but need each other. This is our strength and something that defines us as a Nation that has outstanding individuals formed from outstanding communities. The community and the individual refine each other. The Divine assistance I have witnessed personally through the minyan is reflective of the Nation.

Hashem is pushing us forward because we have no choice. Along the way we are being refined in our faith and by our charitable acts. The powerful and the holy need the poor and wicked. The detached need something but they don't know what, until someone asks them and they volunteer. All of us are growing and being affected by one another like rough diamonds rubbing against each other to refine themselves. As I left the Bet Knesset today, I met a woman outside who told me she recently made aliyah and lives upstairs in my Bet Knesset. Are you serious, I asked her? I didn't know there were rooms up there. Do I have a story to tell you!

In this week of Netzach may we increase our holiness as a Nation and our faith and resilience by our involvement with each other, our prayers and charitable acts. This is our secret weapon and when we exercise our giving and concern for each other one will come to feel the peace and quiet inside the eye of the tornado as Hashem flings our enemies away, protects our soldiers and brings great success and victory to Am Israel.