Death by Indifference (2024)

(Bechukotai)

I heard a story from Rav Biderman about a child who was misbehaving to such a degree that his father after many warnings finally gave him a slap. The child ran to his room crying. The father felt bad and opened the door to check on the child and saw he was writing something. He saw that the child had written to himself 'what is a slap? A short pain, maybe a red cheek and then eventually it goes away.' Imagine the anger of the father when even after a punishment that child made no connection towards the punishment and the misbehaving.

We blame Hashem for the tragedies we invite and never consider the alternative. What would the world be like if we followed His directives? What would the world be like if He went before us like a pillar of fire? How is it that five could chase a hundred and twenty exponentially could chase 10,000, like it says in our Parsha? Rabbi Akiva was optimistic when he saw the destruction of the Bet HaMigdash because it validated that if the punishment is real then the future reward is also just as real.

> Rabbi Shimon in the Zohar said: "Woe to the person who says that the Torah comes to give instructions and tell descriptive stories and simple tales."

Our security, success and blessing are predicated upon our covenant and our annulling and perverting it brings catastrophe.

We look at the Shoa and ask where was God? But where were we many years preceding the Shoa? Where were we many years preceding the destruction of the Bet Hamigdash? Who doesn't have a picture of a great grandfather with a long beard and large family? Long before the Shoa Jews lived in Jewish ghettos that were governed by Jewish law. Even if you lacked faith, you would be ostracized for public displays of irreverence, so there wasn't much choice. However, when the choice came? Jews went streaming out of the ghetto like a flood, shaving their beards and becoming 'modern' and assimilating into the arms of their host countries. As in Egypt and Persia and many other countries we assimilated into, the result was antisemitism that put us back in the Jewish ghetto against our will. The same is happening now, as much as we want to escape our destiny and become modern, and woke and global and simply accepted, we cannot.

Former Prime Minister Naphtali Bennet made an interesting point in his Yom Hazikaron speech of 2022. He stressed that sectarianism destroyed the Jewish state in the Second Temple Period and that *"a sovereign and united Jewish state has never survived here for more than 80 years…the decade we have never succeeded [in getting through]. This time we have another chance, a third chance for the Jewish people. This time we must, simply must succeed."*

We are now in the 76th year of our State. Against our will Hashem is forcing us to be the lions that we must become although the pressure to surrender is immense. This is the week of Yesod, a week before the giving of the Torah on Sinai which caused sin'ah (hatred), to descend upon the idolaters of the world." (Shabbat 89a). Yesod means connection, foundation and secret. It is the symbol of the sign of the covenant as well as Yoseph who precedes Moshiach ben David by fighting the wars of Israel. Hazal tell us that the world was created in order for the Jewish people to receive the Torah.

> "G-d looked into the Torah and created the world. It was the instrument of His work. His only goal was to give His chosen ones, the Jewish people, the Torah by which and for which the world and everything it contains was created" (Zohar I:24).

The blessing and curses are secret things and not so secret. Why calamity strikes individuals only Hashem knows however why calamity strikes communities and nations is related to the values those communities' advocate. In preparation for the giving of the Torah this week was the giving-in to the abomination parade in Jerusalem in a demonstration of pride to pervert the Torah which undermine the very foundations of the world.

A man peddled by this week with a boa constrictor wrapped around his neck to shock pedestrians with his perversion. The Yesod when overcome like Yoseph and Potiphara lead to wealth, honor royalty and family. When we become enslaved by the Yesod we rapidly become more and more degenerate and that moral degeneracy invites our enemies to devour us God forbid.

> 'And the men were afraid, because they were brought into Joseph's house.' (Bereshit 43:18)

This passage is used as a metaphor for the judgment day when we stand before our maker. That judgment day must also be reflected here on earth. Moshiach ben Yoseph not only fights the external wars in Israel but also the internal wars between the Erev Rav. The teshuva process that Am Israel is going through ultimately must bring about a vindication for Moshiach ben Yoseph. Hashem does not expect things from us that we cannot follow. Moshiach ben Yoseph is an example for us to follow, like the messenger who sees the storm and advises us on how to save ourselves. He leads by example. Yoseph saw through Ruach HaKodesh that a famine was coming and prepared Egypt. Moshiach ben Yoseph in our days, who I believe was Rav Kahane, not through Ruach Hakodesh but with sechel (intelligent deduction) and faith, saw the inevitable future, and tried to shake us from our indifference to prevent all the tragedy and suffering that we have invited and still continue to invite. Just like the Yoseph tested his brothers, we will have to experience a similar persecution that we had visited on Moshiach ben Yoseph, until finally we come face to face with ourselves and there is a great reckoning and awakening.

Teshuva and free choice

After each plague Pharaoh was allowed to recover so that he could reflect on the punishment and decide to give in to Hashem's will. He adamantly refused. Eventually his free choice was taken away. The Jews who died in Egypt also had free choice to reflect on the events and join Israel in the exodus. Eventually their choice was also taken away. We can continue to be like that child who gets slapped and sees no connection to his behavior. Those who are disconnected to Hashem and the ramifications of our covenant of the Torah unfolding before their eyes can only beg and plead to Gentiles in the hope that they will be kind to us while we continue on our wayward path. It's a losing game.

Hashem is leading those who wish to be led by Him and warning His children scattered around the world that it is time to come home. It is the time of the exodus. The only shelter in these times of moral decay is in Hashem's mercy and attaching ourselves to His Torah. The success of our soldiers depends on our unity and prayers and our reflection of the covenant that we cannot escape; a covenant that is not a curse but a blessing.

Love Fear and Indifference

My dear departed friend Shifra Hoffman who was a devoted Chassid of Rav Meir Kahane for many years tried to warn American Jews to make emergency Aliyah because of a potential Holocaust that could happen in America. Her opponents would say she was paranoid and she would answer, 'Paranoid Jews live longer'.

One of the antidotes to indifference is fear. Although love is a higher level, alavay that fear should succeed in motivating us to make life changing decisions. I personally was motivated by fear after 9-11 especially when all the airports were closed within 10 minutes. No matter how much money you had, you could not leave the country. I reasoned that there could be a plague one day, or bank collapse and no matter how much money I had I would not be able to escape. Of course, upon escaping in the middle of the Sars outbreak at that time, I immediately fell in love with Israel and my relationship is not based on fear but the love and devotion one feels to one's beloved wife.

Today, much like the Parsha, when the fear of basic survival and peace and security and the value of our money is not that abstract but a real concern, to be increasingly indifferent would cause Hashem to also be increasingly indifferent, just like the Parsha. To those who say the curses are really blessings in disguise I would say that it is possible through adversity for one to reach a place one might not have found without that adversity, however what is the price one will pay?

Israel is certainly a blessing that was born out of the Shoa but was it worth it? Could Israel not have come about with glory and joy without a Shoa? What if there had been less in-fighting and indifference that may have sealed our fate in the Shoa? Why did we need to see a bloodthirsty slaughter of our people on Oct 7 to spring to action against these despicable creatures? Why are we surprised? Did we not have ample examples of their blood lust and hatred and so many victims that preceded these? There was a genocide of Jews in the Omer period as well during the years of Bar Kochba.

The Chassidut of Rabbi Shimon must be understood from this background surrounding his mysticism. When he declares that one must be joyful on his haskara that declaration takes on a much greater meaning when one understands the background. His Rebbe had led the Bar Kochba rebellion against the Gog and Magog of their time and almost succeeded. When the rebellion failed hundreds of thousands of Jews were slaughtered and his Rebbe was tortured to death. His vision of joy was a commandment to overcome their despair and know that their path was correct and will continue and eventually succeed despite the horror they were living through.

There is an interesting Torah code in this week's Parsha that many Chabad people are aware of

לב וְכָל-מַעְשַׂר בָּקָר וָצֹאן, כֹּל אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲבֹר תַּחַת **הַשָּׁבָט--הָעֲשִׂירִי**, יִהְיֶה-קֹדֶשׁ לַיהוָה	32. And tithe of the cattle or the flock, any that passes under the **staff**, the **tenth** one shall be holy to Hashem
לג לֹא **יְבַקֵּר** בֵּין-טוֹב לָרַע, וְלֹא יְמִירֶנּוּ; וְאִם-הָמֵר יְמִירֶנּוּ, וְהָיָה-הוּא וּתְמוּרָתוֹ יִהְיֶה-קֹדֶשׁ לֹא יִגָּאֵל	33 He shall not **inquire** whether it be good or bad, neither shall he change it; and if he change it at all, then both it and that for which it is changed shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed.

(Vayikra 27:32-33)

The 10th cow is to be counted and one cannot choose one that is better or worse. Hidden in this passage is the date the Rebbe Hakodemet haskara. - the 10th of Shvat. But why here? Let me suggest the following. Y'ivkor to choose has the exact same letters as b'keri - indifference that is repeated over and over again in our Parsha. This word indifference is also the gematria of Shoa.

When you erase the yud of Hashems name you are left with bakar - cattle. The passage that we find the Rebbe Hakodemet reminds us of the Shoa and how the Jews were transported in Cattle cars and slaughtered like cattle. The Rebbe Hakodemet himself was plucked out of the Shoa in a miraculous way, just like the seemingly coincidental 10th cow that is chosen at random.

The valuation of the people of Israel is also reminiscent of the Shoa. Eichman at the end of the war was prepared to exchange thousands of Jews for coffee and trucks. Jewish blood was cheap and Jewish lives had less value than cattle. Holy Jews who have the greatest value among mankind were reduced to nameless tattooed animals. In the eyes of our enemies, they are much the same today.

יְבַקֵּר = shall not distinguish

בַּקָּרִי = casualness

בָּקָר = cattle

בַּקָּרִי = casualness

שׁוֹאָה = Shoa

בַּקָּרִי = casualness

Like Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai the Rebbe's light was chosen so that we will continue to battle despair and Chassidut continues today to light fires below physically through Tefillin and Farbrengins and Jewish connections. If you mention reasons for the Shoa however Chabad Chassidim may respond angrily, as I heard the Rebbe once did and tell you we cannot explain the Shoa. Rabbi Kahane on the other hand says by not explaining the Shoa we make Hashem out to be some entity that simply gets angry every once in a while, for no apparent reason.

Binyamin writes:

> 'We say that God supervises over every little thing. He is responsible for everything. "A man does not prick his finger if it was not decreed by Heaven" (Hulin 7). And now we get a Holocaust, and say – don't even try to understand it? Instead of checking the Tanach and seeing how the prophecies actualized themselves, what kind of emunah that would bring! There's no greater vehicle for emunah than this. It is something we saw actualized in our generation. '(Confronting the Holocaust – R. Meir Kahane)

Rav Meir writes:

> "Our failure to grapple with this issue (instead we corrupt our souls by the terrible reply: It is a question no one can answer) has caused us to be silent accomplices in the worst of all Jewish sins and crimes – hiruf v'giduf, blasphemy against the Lord; open insult and attack on His Name – hillul Hashem. How dare we sit by quietly while Jewish ignoramuses and blasphemers speak of the "death of God", and His Name is dragged through the mud of a theology and philosophy of heresy? How dare we allow Him to be blasphemed and our children to be turned down the path of apostasy and atheism because our reply to the attacks of the blasphemers is "No one can answer the question!". Of course, there is an answer! It is a Jewish answer. (Ibid)

He then goes on to explain the background that led up to the Shoa. The chassidut of Rav Kahane takes the baton of indifference and continues the battle of Bar Yochai and Akiva to rebuild our Temple. Even though Rav Khane and his son Binyamin were martyred like Rabbi Akiva, his Chassidut continues and Kahane Chai lives on. This is the fire of Lag B'Omer that lives on, despite torture and death to battle indifference and blow on the coals to reignite our inner flames. Now you may say why should I come to Israel where the rulers are allowing foreign rule to interfere with our mission?

There are a number of answers to this. Number one, you can make a difference. Number two, despite whatever hardships there may be there is a much better chance of survival. Number three, it is a mitzvah, and your life will become more meaningful. As I can attest, your fear may transform to love and devotion, and even wealth and prosperity. He who is wise can see ahead. The west is being undermined because of its moral corruption. China and other tyrants are growing stronger. New Jersey and Los Angeles are not written in the Torah. There is no promise and no heavenly stamp of protection. There is however a promised future in our Land, from the coastal cities to Jerusalem to the hills of Yehuda and Shomron.

> Then will I remember My covenant with Jacob, and also My covenant with Isaac, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land (Vayikra 26:42)

Chazal explains this is written backwards to convey an important message. If not for the sake of Yacov who was born with a brit milah and had the twelve tribes, then for the sake of Itzchak, even though he had Esav. If not for Itzchak, then for Avraham, even though he had Ishmael. And finally, according to Rav Teichtal, if there are no merits of the forefathers, then there is the merit of the Land itself (Eim HaBanim Semeicha).

Outside Israel we are fighting a losing battle. In Israel however, the next battle will cause Israel and the State of Judea to surprise the world in their quest to destroy God. We know He cannot be destroyed no matter how many Pharoah's say 'they know not Hashem'. He may hide for a time because of our sins (chas v'shalom), but that is only because he is waiting for all of us. Remember 5 will chase 100 and 100 will 'not' chase 2000 (which would be mathematically correct) but our Torah tells us that 100 will instead chase 10,000. Every Jew that returns and joins this critical mass increases the strength of Israel exponentially. This is much better than the curse of indifference and its punishments that also increases exponentially.

The lessons of Yesod are both hidden and revealed. Why the best of the best are taken along with all those who had provoked and caused the breach in the wall, are the secret things that belong to Hashem. They say when a flower is cut it makes more flowers grow. In the challenging times we are living in today, our resilience has grown and many new children are being born from soldiers heading off to war.

Bechukotai reminds us not only of spiritual greatness but physically enjoyment that awaits us when we make the proper connection between heaven and earth and overcome our internal and external enemies. How glorious it could be and how joyous and peaceful if only we understood. Bekeri has two sides to it. Yivkor (**יִבָּקֵר**) and B'keri (**בָּקֶרִי**). If we are indifferent, we will be subject to great indifference and our survival will be like a Russian roulette game. The randomness that we believed in will become the randomness of our survival; one in ten if we are lucky. But the Yivkor can be different. We can choose (yivkor) between good and bad. When we understand that the Torah is good, and its commands and warnings are good, it will bring peace and plenty. May we make good choices and good connections between our Torah, our Father, our people, and our land. For there is where freedom lies and the secret of the seeds that we plant whose roots run deep and whose fruits God willing we shall enjoy. We read in next week's Haftorah:

> 'And she shall pursue her lovers and not overtake them, and she shall seek them and not find them; and she shall say, "I will go and return to my first Husband, for it was better for me then than now.' (Hoshea 2:8)

We have no choice. The experiences we have gone through have created a new reality. We have started a new book and cannot return to the old one. To ignore the signs of coming disasters in America, sadly may increase death by the greatest plague of all – indifference. To rise to the calling Hashem reminds us of what He wishes for us. This is the passage directly preceding the curses. This is the glory that could be if we run to it and not away from it.

> "I am Hashem your God, who took you out of the land of Egypt, from being their slaves; and I have broken the bars of your yoke, and I led you erect." (Vayikra 26:13)

As we begin a new book, let the events of this year with its great tragedies and great miracles alter our perception and bring about a transformation and new and better reality. Don't lose your fate to indifference which gives you a random one in ten chance where even merits don't count. Come home and be part of the blessing where even if you have no merits, the Land will lend you some and you will be blessed.

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