

When the Lampshades Will Become Alive

Parshas Bamidbor

Yizkor - Shavuos

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

Family consciousness heightens the excitement in preparation for Shavuos, the festival of the time of the giving of our Torah. So may it be gleaned from a teaching of the Minchas Elazar, Munkacher Rav, z.t.l., whose 73rd yartzeit is observed this Shabbos, second day of Sivan.

The Shulchan Aruch, in regulating the Scriptural reading in the course of the year, teaches that "the portion BAMIDBOR is always read before Shavuos" (428:4). Several reasons are expounded for this particular arrangement. The Munkacher Rav, z.t.l., offers a unique reason: It is because the inclusion in this SIDRA that in the census of the Israelites in the MIDBAR "they established their genealogy according to their families, according to their fathers' household." This family orientation is a basic factor in the exclusive choice of Israel to be given the Torah. For the Midrash tells us (Yalkut Pinchas 772) when the Israelites received the Torah the gentiles jealously asked why the Jewish people above all other nations. Hashem replied it is because they keep a perfect lineage. This, then, concludes the Munkacher Rav, is the connection of portion BAMIDBAR to Shavuos.

The above, one wishes to add, offers a profound explanation of the relevance of YIZKOR on Shavuos. The exclusive family background as the core of Israel selectivity to receive the Torah, includes, thus, the sainted memory of parents, and grandparents, going back to the ancestors. Most appropriately we memorialize the victims of the holocaust, of which we are ALL survivors.

There is an additional aspect in the relevance of YIZKOR on Shavuos. While the Nazis, yemach shemam, were totally engulfed in the process of exterminating Jews every day in the year, they became even more Satanic during this season. The "udim mutzolim m'aish (brands plucked out of the fire) note the special intensification of their bestiality during the days between Pesach and Shavuos. The decimation of Hungarian Jewry in 1944 took place during the last weeks before Shavuos. It is during these weeks that thousands of Yartzeits are observed in the synagogues and Botei Midroshim. Not enough

Minyanim can be found for the many thousands who would like to conduct services (by the Amud) in observance of the Yartzeit. There were no funerals nor burials, only ashes. Yet the YIZKOR recited for them at this period, by the many thousands of survivors as in one voice, with the ultimate in Kavanah, surely galvanizes the foundation of the earth and stirs the Throne Above for the victims to be bound in the Bond of Life, and ultimately merit Techiyas Hamaisim (Resuscitation of the dead).

When Cain killed his brother Hevel, the Al-mighty exclaimed: "the voice of thy brother's blood cries to Me from the ground" (B'raishis 4:10) Rashi notes that the Hebrew for "blood" is in the plural, "Dmei achicho". He explains that it refers to both the blood of Hevel as well as the blood of his potential offspring.

There is another interpretation of this plural term that is paramount during this season of Yartzeit observances for the martyrs. The Rabeinu Bechaya expounds the plural term that it refers to Hevel's blood at the time it was shed, and again at the time it will be revived during Techiah Hamaisim, resurrection.

When we recite YIZKOR for the Kedoshim we think of their screams as they were tortured to death. This is not enough. We must also consider their screams which will be heard at the time of their revival. The first cries were wails of death; the second will be sounds of life.

The resurrection of the dead is part of the process of Redemption (Geulah) though not exactly in the same period. It is one of the thirteen principles of Ani Maamin. Woe to the Nazi beasts on the day of judgment. Woe to the repulsive cannibals on the day of revival. For then the cries of the murdered victims will reach the Heavens. Then will come the second "hearing" of the shed blood, out of the ground from which they will rise.

Once it already happened. Once resurrection was actually experienced. It was at the time when Yechezkel the prophet resurrected the dry bones in the valley of Dura (Ezekiel 37). It occurred as a one time experience for the purpose of strengthening the belief in the principle of resurrection. The dry bones coming to life were symbolic that all Israelites will one day be revived.

A most interesting anecdote, in connection with that revival, is related in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 92b - Daf Yomi for this Shabbos 2 Sivan). Wicked Nevuchadnetzer was having his drink in his cup. It may have been coffee or liquor. Suddenly the cup shattered and hit Nevuchadnetzer in his face. In shock he searched for an explanation. He was told that Yechezkel resurrected the dead bones in Dura. The cup from which he was drinking was made out of the teeth of the dead whom he murdered. Now that they were resurrected, the cup became alive.

What a mind-shattering example of what will occur when the six million victims will rise out of the dust. Woe to the Nazis, y.sh. when their lampshades, made of skin of Jewish victims, will suddenly become animated with life. For it is unthinkable to any faithful Jew that the atrocities perpetrated against our people will go unpunished. That punishment will come to the murderers at the moment of reward for those who gave their life for Kiddush Hashem. At that moment their shouts will come again before Heaven, screaming out of the ground where their blood was shed.

The very theme of resurrection sounds so remote, so utterly removed from our day to day consciousness. On the other hand, it is a principle of faith so fundamental and central that we refer to it thrice daily in the Shemona Esra (silent prayer). It seems, furthermore, from the Midrash also Daas Zekainim (Beraishis 12:2) that only as a compliment to Abraham was the benediction "Mogen Avrohom" placed ahead of "Ato Gibor" (the benediction about resurrection and eternity of life). Originally "Ato Gibor" was meant to be the opening prayer of the Shemona Esra.

Every year, especially at this time when Holocaust Yizkor is observed, we experience a sense of tormenting agony. But then again the principle of resurrection regains for us a measure of equanimity. It accords us the mindfulness that those for whom we say YIZKOR, with that ultimate in Kavanah, will also one day become part of Am Yisroel Chai.

