

Beshalach: Jewish Life Is Not Hefker

- Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

We are an “Am Segula”, a Chosen people, and our relationship with HaShem is very unique. Every human being was created in the image of God and has sanctity. Therefore, the Torah states: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of God He made man”. (Bereishit 9:6). But our relationship goes beyond that. To us the Torah states: “Banim Atem La’HaShem” (You are CHILDREN to HaShem) (Devarim 14:1). The difference between the two has many ramifications.

When an adult sees two children fighting, a bully hurting and beating a smaller child, the adults’ instincts would be to help the smaller child by separating them and driving away the larger bully. However, if this smaller child who was hurting happens to be the child of this adult, he would not merely separate the aggressor but would even squeeze his arm while sending him away so as to punish him for hurting his child. That is the way Hakadosh Baruch Hu relates to us.

When the Egyptians were drowning in the sea Moshe and Bnei Yisrael describe it as “They descended in the depths like STONE” (Shemot 15:5). In a second expression, they describe the defeat of the Egyptians in the following manner. “You sent forth Your wrath it consumes them like STRAW (Shemot 15:7). Then there comes a third image to describe the drowning. “They sank as LEAD in the mighty waters (Shemot 15:10). Did the Egyptians sink like stone, straw, or lead? Which was it? Rashi notes that the variances describe different punishments the Egyptians deserved. The wicked were tossed around like weightless straw- they were allowed to brutally suffer. The best of the group drowned like lead, which is heavy and sinks immediately- they suffered the least. Those who fell in the in-between category sank like stones. The precision of the punishment was a clear statement that those who were guilty of oppressing and murdering Jews would receive their due.

Rav Soloveitchik wrote (Kol Dodi Dofek), that just as HaShem had shown the Egyptians that Jewish blood is not free for taking, it is not HEFKER, so was it with the establishment of the State of Israel. During the Holocaust, Jewish life, for most of the world, was worthless. However, with the establishment of the state, one could sense God’s presence in that Jews would be from now on protected. No one would be able to spill blood in Israel without a response. The Yishuv in Eretz Yisrael is sending a message to the Jews in exile and to the entire world- “Jewish blood will no longer be cheap and certainly no longer hefker”

Shabbat Shalom to all (and hopefully not a snowy cold one)

Aharon Ziegler