

# Shoftim: Lo Tasig Gevul

- Nisson Shulman.

The thrilling walk to Kotel and around the walls, what do we really see.

Shoftim: Lo Tasig Gevul (written in 5762, 2002)

Last Monday, Erev Rosh Hodesh Elul, in Israel, there was a pilgrimage to the wall of thousands of people. Busloads of people came to the wall throughout the day, and especially towards evening, because it was Yom Kippur Katan of Erev Rosh Hodesh Elul, a day especially dedicated to Teshuva and turning our hearts towards prayer for the coming year. Of course, this year the emphasis of the prayers included the prayer for peace in the region and for the world.

Walking through the old city's Jewish quarter with its new archeological exhibits, one is gripped again with the sense of history, of destiny. The exposed walls from Solomon's time, from Hashmonean times, Roman times, the era of Byzantium, and from all of this to emerge to the throngs praying for peace in our time, and especially for a renewal of life, health, faith and hope during the coming year, brings home the contrast, of a world at war, threatened by terrorists who are abetted by anti-Semitism. America declared war on terrorists after 9/11, and most in our government recognize the similarity of Israel's struggle against wanton murderers with America's struggle against global terrorism. With this difference; that Israel is fighting for its very existence.

Which makes the spirit of the citizens of Israel all the more wonderful and miraculous, is the attitude of business as usual, of calm in the midst of tension. It is if the awareness is growing in all quarters, even those who are not religious, of the great miracle of our survival until now. There is a constant and unspoken prayer in everyone's heart that this miracle continues into the future. Which makes Israel more than ever, "The land of the Courageous.

The spirit within Israel also includes the growing awareness that our survival does not depend on great powers, but in the greatest power of all, the power of Almighty God who has guided us through crisis after crisis, until we have come to this new moment when we prepare for a new year, praying that it be a Shana Tova, shenat shalom uberacha..

This pilgrimage on Yom Kippur Katan was eclipsed in magnitude by the pilgrimage on Tisha B'Av evening and our presence in great numbers all through that day of fasting and teshuva. There is an old Tisha B'av custom that Jews walk around the Temple Mount by walking around Jerusalem on top of its walls. What scenes these walls had beheld, what stories they could tell of our people's heroism and our enemies' barbarism. How great the inspiration that march gave to the many thousands who came and made that historic walk. Each step could be considered a prayer Sheyibane bet Hamikdash bimhera beyamenu. Both the great pilgrimage at Tisha B'Av, and the smaller one on Yom Kippur Katan, was a lesson of unity and courage of our beleaguered people. Even those who once sought to give any concession to accommodate the policy of "land for peace" now recognize that Israel must make itself ready for any future sacrifices. And they do so with amazing courage; continue to ride the roads, do their business and fight terrorism in

their own way as their intelligence indicates they must. It is not just a remembrance of a march around the walls, an old custom revived. It is a march that represents our continued march through history and the providence of Almighty God on every step of the way.

The media keeps harping on Israeli intelligence and that it is the best in the Middle East. That may or may not be so. But Israel does have more experience than anyone else when it comes to dealing with terrorism and terror tactics, with tyrants and their insatiable appetites.

Churchill once said about appeasement of the Nazis; "Each one thinks that if he feeds the crocodile most, the crocodile will devour him last". At least for the time being, many sensible nations of the world have recognized the danger of such a policy. At least for the present they recognize the need to starve the crocodile and if necessary to throttle and destroy it.

We are the nation that originated Shoftim Veshotrim; law and order, justice incorruptible, communities of scholars, Sanhedrin, authors of righteousness and teachers of loving-kindness. That is the main theme of this week's Torah reading, a portion that contains rules given to our fathers on the brink of entering the Promised Land, laws governing humane conduct in war that, if truly understood, would be a model to the world more advanced than any international body of laws of today; laws and rules of setting up our own government, and rules governing our conduct in peace towards our neighbors as well.

It is not helpful to tell the world, "I told you so". That is a lesson they will learn by themselves. But there is a lesson in this Torah portion that needs to be applied and understood.

We read the commandment, prohibiting us from encroaching on our neighbor's land by moving the boundary marker; *Lo tasig gevul reecha*. Rashi asks: Why do you need a special commandment? Isn't *Lo tignov* enough?

Rashi explains that there are two steps to this crime. The first is removing the boundary, and it might appear that you are doing nothing wrong as yet. The second is replacing the boundary marker in a new place and occupying land that is not yours. Both are a crime. Both are wrong. The intent alone is already aggression. But the second transgression carries the intent a step further into action.

The lesson is clear. The Hamas and Fatah bomb factories; the tunnels of bomb and bullet and rocket supplies from Egypt; the attempt to land equipment of war by sea; these are the first part of designs and dreams of mass murder. We have seen that those preparations are not merely clear threats, but in the end constitute actual aggression. Israel must search Arab populated cities and refugee camps because the weaponry and bomb-making factories, the stores of arms and the terrorism planners are the first step of the actual bombs in Pizza shops, ambushes at roadways, and ultimately bombs at such places as Hebrew University itself. You cannot separate them. The bomb making is the intent, removal of an existent landmark of an agreement to seek peace. That leads immediately and directly with the actual aggression, violation of the second part of the sequence.

The world's task and challenge is clear. The stakes for which we fight are clear. It is the

providential hand of God that has placed this struggle between good and evil where it should be, on an international battlefield, but it is also our life and death struggle within the boundaries of Israel.

The pilgrimages to the Western Wall and the Tisha B'Av walk around the walls is in the spirit of teshuva and prayer, has an important lesson for us; that we must think, not only in national terms, but in personal ones as well. For this is a time of teshuva, and this lesson has spiritual dimensions that can be applied to the life of all of our people everywhere in the world.

There are many Jews today who have drifted "out of bounds" of the rules set down in the Torah. Some have drifted so far away, that their life style is not recognizable in any way as Jewish, and they no longer consider themselves as being of the Jewish faith.

But are they entirely to blame? Is not their estrangement also the result of the earlier removal of time-honored landmarks, such as Sabbath, Torah study, and the purity of Jewish family life? Who is to blame for the removal of these boundaries? Are not parents, or grandparents, and even, to some measure, the Jewish community itself?

So the warning is issued to all of them, and to all Jews, Lo tasig gevul. "Watch the landmarks". They are our last line of defense. They are our best, and usually our only weapons in the Jewish struggle for life and future.

The story is told about a certain Reb Yitzchok of Cracow, a pious, but poor man. One night he dreamed that during a pogrom, his ancestors had buried a treasure. When he awoke, he began to rush about in every direction, looking everywhere for the treasure.

An old wise man saw this and said, "Reb Yitzchok, you are looking for the treasure in the wrong place. Go back home. Dig in your own back yard. If there is a treasure, that is where you will surely find it".

And so we all must look for the great treasures of the spirit, not elsewhere, but within your own boundaries, and indeed, within the values of the families we came from as they lived generations ago.