

Yom Kippur, Job, Ezra, Divre Hayamim

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Nisson Shulman. Kohen Kagol'd preparation to read from Job, Ezra and Divre Hayamim. The reason, and the application to our time

YOM KIPPUR: KOHEN GADOL, JOB, EZRA, DIVRE HAYAMIM

In olden times, seven days before Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol was isolated to prepare him spiritually for the sacred service in the Holy Temple. As part of this preparation, they used to read to him from scripture. They chose books of the Bible which were particularly relevant to the service and the theme of Yom Kippur. What books did they choose? The mishna tells us they read three books: Job, Ezra, and Divre Hayamim, called Chronicles.

The book of Job is full of anguish. The book of Ezra tells of the great return to Zion and the renewal of our settlement, and then our Jewish State in ancient Israel, and finally that we even rebuilt the Holy Temple, the Bet Hamikdash. The book of Divre Hayamim is the last book of scripture which summarizes all of Jewish history until Cyrus' permission to return to Israel and eventually rebuild the Temple which led to the great spiritual contribution of Ezra HaSofer.

Why? What is the particular relevance of these three books to the holy Yom Kippur Service?

HIGH PRIEST REPRESENTED KELAL YISRAEL.

The High Priest was the representative of the whole people of Israel. His deepest concern was to be their welfare. His preparation therefore dealt with our people's condition in history, with the unfolding of our destiny.

JOB - TZAROT;
EZRA - REVIVAL.

Job, to the High Priest, represented the chapters of tzarot that the Jewish people endured. The question is; when you experience tzarot, do you feel that is the end of the road? The experience of the Jewish people is that after every period of hardship and persecution, there came a period of Ezra, of God's help, a period of our people's revival. In Ezra's time, this period even included the reestablishment of the Jewish State and the rebuilding of the Holy Temple. It was as if our nation had actually started life all over again. The lesson is that if we have an era of Job, we should not therefore give up the expectation of better times.

Ezra's revival began slowly, 70 years after the tragic destruction of the Temple the desolation of Israel and the exile to Babylon. There were only 42,000 Jews who had returned with Zerubabel. Nehemiah gradually restored the physical security of the State, and Ezra restored spiritual greatness to the people.

JUST SO IN OUR TIME

Just so in our time, after one of the bitterest periods in all our history, even after the holocaust, our people have rebuilt the Promised Land, generated a period of return, revived Jewish culture and learning; all this after only approximately 60 years since the Jews were supposed to have reached the lowest point in all of history.

DIVRE HAYAMIM - CHRONICLES - CONTINUUM - GEULA

And the third book, Chronicles, demonstrates that history not only has cycles, is a turning wheel, but that there is a continuum, a connection from the very beginning of our people until the ultimate Geula. There is a tendency for the Jew to feel that when he is on top nothing can change and that it will remain that way. But we must never take these things for granted. On the contrary. We must always strive to be worthy of our blessings so that they may continue. And we must also strive to bring about the final upward cycle, the ultimate Geula, praying and hoping that it is drawing near - just as Chronicles ends on a note of hope and promise for the future.

IS TODAY ATCHALTA DEGEULA?

Today we are living at a crossroads of Jewish History. Great events are happening before our eyes, amazing fulfillments of prophecies, and we must open our eyes to see them and to interpret them. Are these events part of the final, ultimate Geula, – this streaming of Jews from many parts of the world towards Israel? Even the special trials and challenges that terrorism creates, and the way Israel is meeting them, and the challenge of finding ways citizens of Israel and members of its government can work together, are these additional challenges part of the traditional CHEVLEI MASHIACH, the hardships we are told strew the way towards redemption? Does it mean that the chronicle of Jewish life is drawing to a climax?

IS THE DREAM REAL? IT DEPENDS ON US!

It has been happening so gradually, and yet, somehow, we feel that a dream is becoming real, coming true before our eyes, and we tremble lest we wake and discover the dream dissolved. And that places on us an awesome responsibility, for ours is the task to see that the process of redemption continue as it has begun, so that the dream become reality.

SHAZAR

The late president of Israel, Zalman Shazar. in his memoirs, wrote about his 1971 visit to the United States.

"Ambassador Yitzchok Rabin and I visited the White House in March. We were surprised at the elaborate, festive and warm reception that the President arranged for us. Rabin was pleased, and told me that much more was being done than was originally planned and that was significant. But may I reveal the truth? At that time I was overcome with a deep sadness, for I remembered an experience of my boyhood."

"I was then Bar Mitzvah age. My father, who had suffered severe business reverses, was on a trip which would mean success or failure, and upon the outcome of which depended our family's future. My mother was despondent. She cried and prayed for the success of my father's mission."

"One day, as she was praying, there was a knock on the door. Two women entered, carrying silver candlesticks. Gladly they announced that my mother had won the candlesticks at a raffle held for a charity benefit. Joy filled my heart, until I saw my mother crying bitterly."

"'Mother, why do you cry?' I asked. She replied, 'God wanted to placate me, so he sent me two silver candlesticks. But did I pray to Him for silver candlesticks? I actually prayed for a Yeshua, for help for our home and our family!'"

"I remember how I drew near to my mother and embraced her, saying, 'Mother, don't cry. Perhaps it was the intention of God to send you, through these candlesticks, a sign that salvation is at hand. With these candlesticks he wanted you to know that Yeshua, help, is coming.'"

"As long as I live", wrote Zalman Shazar, "I will never forget how my mother looked at me at that moment. Even while tears continued to flow. She said to me, 'You have comforted me my son.'"

"When I saw that great and extraordinary reception which the President arranged in my honor, I could not help but remember my mother's reaction to the silver candlesticks. Did I pray for a parade? A military guard of honor? All of this fanfare? Actually I prayed for a great Yeshua, the help, the salvation, for which we are all longing. I was looking around for a son who would comfort me, just as I comforted my mother."

We are living at a time when it is easy to turn to other nations; easy to be satisfied with tokens, small symbols, even to grasp at straws: for the lowering of the PLO prestige; for the united world finally come to realize the evil nature of Sadaam Hussein which all along Israel was trying to convey; for the momentary disarray of many of our foes. And we pray for Yeshua - for that time "when nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

We understand full well the complications and daily uncertainties, the immense question-marks about what will soon happen in the world today.

THE LESSON OUR OWN SONS AND DAUGHTERS

But we must also recognize, with the mother of Zalman Shazar, that if we would truly be comforted with nothing less than complete YESHUA, then that assurance and promise can come from no other nation on earth, but only our own sons and daughters, guided and helped by Almighty God. Our Yeshua depends on us; on the confidence, the courage, the readiness to face whatever trials the future holds. And that is the best comfort this hour can bring. And there lies the most important lesson of the process of Geula. Redemption, Yeshua, will not happen by itself, nor by other nations, nor by happenstance of history, but rather through the strength and readiness of our own people standing together, under the providence of Almighty God.

LIKE THE KOHEN GADOL WE MUST READ FROM JOB, EZRA AND CHRONICLES.

The Kohen Gadol read from the book of Job, the book of anguish, and remembered the hardship, so must we. He read from Ezra, the book of God's help and salvation, and so must we. He read from Chronicles, seeking to guide his people to inscribe the salvation indelibly in history, forever and unchanging, a struggle we seek to continue, for so must we. It has not yet happened, but there will be an age when it will be inscribed forever, indelible, on the pages of history, the age when our Jewish people themselves we, and our own sons and daughters, write it into history with their commitment, and that is given to us here and now to do...

NEVER SINCE THE KOHEN GADOL DID WE HAVE THIS CHANCE

For never since the time of the High Priest of old till this very day has there arisen this kind of an opportunity to make history, as we have in our time. May Hashem give us the courage, the strength, the united purpose and the faith to bring the Geulah and Yeshuva to all our people.
AMEN.