

Come Let Us Make an Accounting

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It is the time of year to make an accounting, to take stock of our lives, to improve our conduct and correct our behavior in preparation for the Day of Judgment, Rosh Hashana. The month of Elul should be devoted to serious reflection and genuine soul searching, searing and painful though it may be. After the inner turmoil of true “cheshbon hanefesh” comes a sense of calm and serenity that marks a person at peace with himself. We will of course examine carefully the state of our personal lives, reflect on our successes and failures, recall dreams fulfilled and those not yet fulfilled, make plans for the future and arrive at the conclusion that the future starts right now.

בואו ונעשה חשבון של עולם — “Come let us make an accounting of the world,” includes another dimension as well. The point at which my personal life converges with the life of the larger Jewish community world wide and most specifically in Eretz Yisroel should take top priority. The depth of that Klal-Yisroel relationship needs to be addressed because upon it hinges our entire defense before the Bar of Heavenly Judgment. We do not wish to be judged alone in isolation from the Klal. It is told about Reb Elchanan Wasserman ד"ה that he asked not to be called to the Torah on the Yomim Noraim. The gabei of the Yeshiva asked him, "But Rebbe, the Shulchan Aruch says that one should try to be called to the Torah during the Yomim Noraim?" Reb Elchanan responded, "By calling 'Yaamod Reb Elchanan Bunim ben Reb Naftali Beinish' I will be singled out from all the rest of the Klal and I do not want that."

The source for this is the dialogue between the Prophet Elisha and the Shunamite who had provided him with a place to stay when he would pass through. The text says, “It happened one day that he arrived there.... 'Can something be done on your behalf to the king?' Elisha asks the Shunamite." He wishes to express his gratitude for her kindness. Her response is brief and puzzling. She replied, “I dwell among my people.” - בתוך עמי אנכי יושבת -

The Zohar says that “the day” was Rosh Hashona and the "King" to whom Elisha refers is the Sovereign of the World. Elisha asks her if he can importune the Almighty on her behalf on this Day of Judgment. She responded that she does not wish to be singled out from the community. "I want to be included in the prayers of all of Israel." She wants to be part of Klal Yisroel. When there is judgment prevailing in the world one should not stand alone.

It follows therefore that the key to Rosh Hashona is one’s relationship with the larger Jewish community. Our cheshbon hanefesh must focus on that crucial dimension of our lives.

Well, how did we respond to the call of the hour?

This Elul marks ten years since the adoption of the Oslo accords, the Declaration of Principles, the handshake on the White House lawn etc. Ten years since Oslo burst

out in all its fury and ferocity. It has divided the Jewish people in a way that very few issues have in all of our history.

I believe that it is necessary for each of us to examine how did we respond, and what is even more important — why?

We should have learned something during the last ten years. It has been a decade that brought suffering, terror, maiming, death, bereavement, and trauma to a whole nation. A decade that brought to the world scene the scourge of suicide bombers and to our screens the horror of bombed out charred buses, shattered restaurants and to our ears ambulances, police, rescue crews, M.D.A., ZAKA, and sirens, sirens and yet more sirens.

The orthodox Jewish community's responses ranged from uncompromising opposition, to enthusiastic near euphoric embrace. Somewhere in the middle there were those who took the cautious wait and see approach, and somewhere else that defies definition, there were people who were absolutely indifferent to what was taking place.

Let us briefly examine each of the four responses and suggest the cheshbon hanefesh that each must make. Since the issues raised by Oslo will be accompanying us for a long time to come and we will be called upon to respond again and again, we should be equipped with a reassessment of the decade that has just passed.

The opposition to Oslo was motivated by deep distrust of Arab motives, a revulsion from dealing with world class killers, the architects of the scourge of international terrorism, the belief that no one has the right to take the near irreversible step of relinquishing any part of Eretz Yisroel to another people, and a deep and abiding sense of the sanctity of the land. Looking ahead there lurked the fear of the unthinkable that an Israel government would once again forcibly remove Jews from their homes in the very heartland of Eretz Yisroel.

The big question that they must ask themselves is "did they do enough to voice their protest, and was there more that could have been done? Did they act intelligently? Did they marshal all the forces that they could? What are they doing right now? Where is the outcry of a suffering, bleeding people?"

Then there were the Oslo enthusiasts who reasoned that some accommodation must be made for an Arab population that cannot be denied some form of self government (at the outset you will recall no one talked of a Palestinian state); the hope that finally there may be an end to war and terror, that bloodshed and suffering on both sides would be put behind us, that we could finally remove the stain of being occupiers (of our own land?).

The big question that they must ask themselves is how could they have been so naïve? How could they believe that the terrorist gangsters meant what they said and would indeed keep their commitment? How far could one stretch the imagination to include a repentant, peace loving group of killers as Israel's partners in a great adventure of the human spirit?

Could it be that a desire to be politically correct and to be part of the establishment consensus, was a factor that influenced that approach? Is it possible that taking a position for Oslo marked a

person as a thinker, and an intellectual open to change, a compassionate individual who can embrace fresh notions, one who is ready to take risks for peace? That's quite a heady combination of combustible ingredients.

They must also ask themselves whether they have the courage to admit that Oslo, both in its conception and most certainly in its application, was a tragic mistake nearly unparalleled in all of Jewish history. The only possible hope of salvaging some degree of value from the process could have been achieved by holding Arafat responsible to carry out every detail of the accord. They should have stopped everything at the first violation rather than foolishly overlooking and excusing every breach of the contract. The shoddy, near criminal neglect of the most fundamental details of the accords, doomed it to absolute failure. Are we doing the same thing now?

Those who took the cautious, wait and see approach must ask themselves why didn't they take a solid position for or against? Was the vacillation between the poles a genuine anguish of being torn apart inwardly by the enormity of the consequences or was it a convenient kind of abstention from life? In the depths of one's soul the accounting should consider the possibilities that "the wait and sees" were motivated by cowardice or worst of all indifference.

What is most surprising and baffling is that there indeed was and probably still is a segment of the orthodox community and that includes its leadership that is indifferent to the anguish of Eretz Yisroel. They will most certainly protest, "But we say Tehillim every day." Nevertheless the mark of indifference is there for all to see.

The first three: the opposers, the embracers and the fence sitters were motivated by something for better or worse — but the indifferent ones are the most difficult to comprehend. Since they are not involved they are unable to make any kind of accounting. They will ask themselves no questions and just go about their business. It doesn't concern them, they have no interest in the subject, they go about leading their own lives, even quite pious and observant, but Eretz Yisroel just doesn't enter the picture. They may even be annoyed by it as an unnecessary invasion of their lives, maybe even "bitul Torah."

Could the indifference be part of a general malaise abroad in our community? In many conversations with young people it becomes quite apparent that in most cases no one has ever really spoken to them about the mitzvah to live in Eretz Yisroel, or the profound significance of love of Eretz Yisroel that was so much a central part of Jewish consciousness through the ages. They are so uninformed about basic ideas related to Eretz Yisroel that it is no wonder that they are indifferent. The question "do you consider living in Eretz Yisroel?" has so often been answered without embarrassment by a definite and resounding "No"!

How can any G-d fearing, Torah Jew discount with finality the possibility of living in Eretz Yisroel when Jews of all generations yearned, longed, hoped and prayed for just that. There is something seriously wrong!

The "indecisive" or abstainers have to consider the unprecedented indictment of Rabbi Zacharya

[הגליתנו היכלנו את ושרפה ביתנו את התריביה אבקילס בן זכריה רבי של ענוותנותו יוחנן רבי אמר]

[מאריצנו]

the son of Avkilus by Rabbi Yochanan. His inability to make a decision in a matter of grave danger to life brought on the destruction of the Second Temple, the Beit Hamikdash, the razing of Yerushalayim and the exile from our land.

Edmund Burke said, “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

The Rambam in Hilchot Teshuva says that a person should see himself as though his record is half good deeds and half sins, and the whole world as well is perched precariously at the halfway mark, half good deeds and half sins. If the individual does one mitzvah he inclines his personal scale and that of the whole world for merit and if unfortunately he commits one sin he has brought down destruction upon himself and the whole world.

Why doesn't the Rambam posit a third possibility — that he will do nothing, just abstain? Obviously, because in life there is no place for abstaining and there is therefore no such possibility. Life is lived and people act. The abstainers have a great deal to think about.

Come let us make an accounting of our involvement with the Klal. Can we truly say אנכי עמי בתוך יושבת — “I dwell among my people”.

On the answer to that question hinges the outcome of the days of Awe.

May we see the fulfillment of the words of Isaiah Chapter 65:

זעקה וקול בכי קל עוד ישמע-ולא בעמי וששתי בירושלים וגלתי — “...for I will rejoice over Jerusalem and exult with My people, and there will no longer be heard in it the sound of weeping and the sound of outcry.”

And may we merit Ktiva VaChatimah Tova.