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"Sword or Peace?!"



On Rosh Hashanah it is judged:

"Which countries will be put to the Sword and which will enjoy Peace...?!"

(from the Remembrance - zichronot section of the Rosh Hashanah Musaf Amidah prayer)

Lately, during my prayers, I cover my face with my Talit as well as the top of my head. That is because: 1. It affords the isolation needed to avoid distraction and enables thoughtful concentration on the verbalized prayer. 2. It also allows reflection on the problems we are facing and prompts us to beseech G-d's help to solve them. 3. It is written that, "**The gates of tears are never locked,**" (Brachot 32) and G-d always listens and accepts with compassion "tearful voices of prayers." Prayer is more effective when accompanied by tearful crying. With a covered face, protected from the sight of other people, it is easier to overcome our inhibitions and to cry freely during our prayers as our heart would like to do. It is better to cry **before**, for the success of our endeavors, rather than cry **after** unfortunate things happen.

Each one of us has his own personal reasons for crying, every day, at each time for prayer. When I hear a Cantor (Chazan) lead the prayers, I judge his effectiveness by how many tears he was able to prompt me to shed during the prayer service.

I cry almost every day during my own prayers. However this Rosh Hashanah I was moved to cry profusely for the first time at a specific point in the prayer service. When I came to the point in the Mussaf prayer which says that on Rosh Hashanah, G-d decides: "**Which countries will be put to the Sword and which will enjoy Peace?**" I cried for the safety of our Land of Yisrael for fear of the Iranian nuclear threat.

I am not usually a fearful person. As an illustration, in the 5708 (1948) war, as a young commander, on mountain Har-Tzion, Yerushalayim, in preparation to storm to the old city and liberate the "Kotel Hama'arvi," I went out on a mission that no one else was ready to volunteer for and which exposed me to machine-guns crossfire so dangerous that none of my fellow soldiers in the unit were willing to accompany me, even at a distance.

In the face of that danger, I followed the advice given to me by my father Z"L, who suggested to me that in time of need and danger I should recite Psalm 91: "Hashem is my shelter... you would not fear the night and arrows by day." I am certain that reciting this Psalm protected me and allowed me to survive, the hundreds of bullets that were aimed at me, several of which I heard whistling by less than an inch from my ears and others that kicked up sparks as they hit the rocks on the ground near my feet.

My soldiers could not believe that I would survive. One of them kept shouting at me from far behind: "Imanuel!! Are you still alive?" I did not answer him, since I was too busy dodging the machineguns fire and reciting the Psalms. With the help of G-d, I was able to successfully complete my mission. I was deathly scared, but I did not cry then and miraculously, I managed to return unscathed to my base.

However, we are not permitted to rely on miracles, and if Iran succeeds in producing only one nuclear bomb, the entire country would be, G-d forbid, in mortal danger. This is not a question of the life or death of just one person: "**Who will live and who will die?**" Our entire country stands on the scales of Divine judgment for "Life or, G-d forbid, for Death?" **Did you cry about it, too?** Even if you did, crying alone is not enough! **What are you ready to do about it??**

The Talmud Sanhedrin (94) teaches us, that Yerushalayim and the entire land of Yisrael were saved from slaughter and destruction by Sancherev's huge army, through the actions of the **Real Angel Gavriel**, because of the merit from the fact that **A L L** our people of that generation **learned and observed the mitzvah of Mikva. If and when we will achieve the same, we will merit the same!** (Essay: "**Real Angels!!**" **How can I merit their help??**).

Today, when we face a similarly imminent threat to our survival, it is time for us to make a similar personal commitment. For the Jewish people to survive, each one of us must do his share to promote **Mikva Education for every Jew**, both locally in our own community, and globally. That way, in the merit of the mitzvah of Mikva, the land of Israel will once again be saved from destruction and the intermarriage holocaust now consuming Jews in the Diaspora will be brought to a halt. (Essay - "**Intermarriage Endangers You and Israel, Stop it! How?!**")

Because "**In G-d We Trust!**" is printed on every U.S.A. bill & coin, G-d rewards it by being the richest and mightiest country in the world. **By contrast**, on Israel's Declaration of Independence the name of G-d was refused to be inserted. After a long fight a compromise ensued and only a descriptive name of Hashem was inserted. Beyond that the government is silent or often hostile toward religious life. Observance of all G-d's commandments will merit us "**Real Angels**" to bring Peace Now.

From the Shabbat-Tshuva 5771 Shalosh-Se'udos Drasha, at West-Side Institutional Synagogue, Manhattan, NY, by Rabbi Imanuel Ravad – עמנואל ראב"ד