



The Message of the Flag

There is a saying in the Gemara¹ that sometimes words or actions bespeak prophecy, without intention – מתנבא ואינו יודע ממה מתנבא. There are words, actions or events, that at times reflect something much deeper than the players involved even realize. During the time of *haKamat haMedina* (the establishment of the State) the blue and white colors were decided on to make up the newly crafted Israeli flag. Although the founders were not wary of all the deep significance of their choice, I think we can appreciate it even more, with 70 plus years of hindsight.

What is it about the flag that gives us an emotional tug whenever we see it waving in the wind, or being held by young schoolchildren performing *daglanut* (a flag dance)? Why is our heart touched when we see our public areas bedecked with the flag? Maybe we can suggest two ideas to help explain this intense feeling.

Rav Soloveichik writes about the symbolism of these colors: “The color white denotes clarity, distinctiveness, rationality, that which is self-evident. White symbolizes purity in the *Navi*. The expression *haDevarim meli-banim* means the subject is crystal clear. *Techelet*, the blue, in contrast, focuses our thoughts on the grand mysteries of human experience which elude our precise understanding. The

seas and heavens are boundless and beyond human reach.”

Thus, these two colors symbolize what is clear and understandable in our lives, as well as what is beyond our comprehension, the realm of a *chok*, what will remain a mystery to the human condition. When we see the flag, we recognize both the grandeur and the sacrifice, the redemption and the accompanying pain, the Yom HaAtzmaut and the Yom HaZikaron of this historical process.

But there is another element to our feelings, maybe even opposite in a certain sense. The *mitzvah* we associate with these colors is, of course, the *mitzvah* of *tzitzit*. We find this *mitzvah*, one of the few equal to all *mitzvot*, juxtaposed specifically at the end of *parashat Shelach*. It appears that it somehow closes and fixes the sin of the spies. But in what sense? Even the same words are used to link these sections, וְלֹא תִתְּרוּ and לְתוֹרַת הָאֶרֶץ, אֲחֵרֵי לְבַבְכֶם וְאַחֲרֵי עֵינֵיכֶם. What exactly is the underlying connection? We know that the sin of the spies, at root, was a rejection of *Am Yisrael's* unique hold in *Eretz Yisrael*. Rav Zalman Melamed² suggests that everything our enemies see in our flag, we need to recognize in it as well.

“In their eyes, the Israeli flag symbolizes the yearning of the Jews to return their homeland, to Yerushalayim, to *Har HaBayit* ... to build the

Beit Hamikdash, to ingather all the exiles, and to settle Jews in the entire Land of Israel... They see in the flag a dream of the Jewish nation to continue its unique path of Divine connection. They see an alive and vibrant nation that wants to capitalize on all of its spiritual potentials...”³

The message is that it cannot just be what *they* feel, but what we believe. We believe in the ingathering of exiles, of taking part in the Divine plan of rebuilding the Land of Israel. We believe we need to actively acquire G-d's three special gifts to the Jewish people – Torah, *Olam HaBa*, and *Eretz Yisrael*.⁴ We believe – as the Kuzari writes – that the more we want it, the sooner it'll happen. When will לְיִשׁוּעַתְךָ בִּישׁוּעַתְךָ be? When כִּי יִשׁוּעַתְךָ קוּיִנוּ כָּל הַיּוֹם.

Yehi ratzon that we recognize the gift that is the Land of Israel, and the modern physical symbolism of our connection to it. May it be His will that all Jews return to their Homeland, in health, peace and unity.

1 Sotah 12a.

2 *LaZman HaZeh* p. 48.

3 Translation by Rabbi Rosner.

4 Berachot 4.

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