



There's No Place Like Home

At the start of the 20th century, the Socialists argued that there would be no world war because the workers would refuse to fight. The German workers identify with their French counterparts – and not with the rich of their own people – and so they wouldn't agree to march towards a national war.

And then, of course, the war began in 1914 and the German Kaiser proclaimed: "I no longer think in terms of parties... today we are all German brothers and only German brothers." The President of the French Parliament, Deschanel, also declared: "Here there are no longer rivals, only French." And once they understood their people were under threat, the Socialists toed the line, discarding their party membership books and enlisting to fight for their people.

The COVID-19 crisis is minuscule in comparison to the First World War but there are similarities nevertheless. Before Corona, we were witness to ongoing ridicule of national consciousness and its importance. Just two months ago, the Scandinavian airline, SAS, launched a campaign with the slogan: "What is really Scandinavian? Nothing. It's all copied." The ad continues by explaining how the Scandinavians took democracy from Greece, bicycles from Italy, windmills from Persia, and so on. The company was shocked by the negative reactions. After all, the European Union has gained more and more power at the expense of its member countries. National borders and currencies have disappeared and European leaders tend to agree that nationalism was the past and global awareness was the future, perhaps even the present.

And then COVID-19 appeared. When European countries found themselves with their backs to the wall, they suddenly discovered that national borders were extremely important. Italy begged the EU for medical equipment; Germany and France refused to send any. It was actually China that volunteered to send a plane full of respiratory machines, adorned with little Chinese and Italian flags. When Italy begged the EU for financial support, Holland and others vehemently opposed it. Ursula Von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, published a letter of apology to Italy, complaining that when Europe's countries need each other, they show that their own country comes first. Surprise surprise!

The most obvious expression of European unity is the Schengen Agreement, which ensured freedom of movement between EU countries. With the outbreak of COVID-19, more and more countries announced the closure of their borders. Even Angela Merkel, who had spearheaded the open border policy, had to recognize reality and severely limit the entry of foreign nationals after three weeks of the virus. As the President of Italy's Veneto region said, "The Schengen Agreement is no longer valid and will only be remembered in the history books."

The illusion of globalization is dead. Nationalism lives. What is nationalism? The simple belief that my national framework is identified with my people. Of course, every country has its minorities, but the universally common political model rests on a clear national majority awareness. I am prepared to fight for my country because it protects my nation, the people with whom I have a common

heritage, language, memory and dreams.

In recent years, there has been much talk about "digital nomads," young people who move to another country every few weeks, rent an Airbnb, work on a laptop on cafes and when they've had enough pack up and move on to the next country. Journalists all over the world told us this is the future. Who needs a home? A family? A country? All you need is a laptop and a credit card.

Well no, it seems. Who stays in a student apartment abroad when there's a pandemic raging on the streets? Who remains in a foreign country when medical resources are in short supply? From all over the world, Israelis began to stream back to Israel. The country did everything in its power to bring them back, despite the risks and costs.

Because when a storm is raging outside, everyone realizes there's no place like home.

Pesach is the time of our national covenant. When our forefathers were slaves in Egypt, they remembered they were not Egyptians but Hebrews. They were recognizable as a nation in themselves - "*metsuyanim sham*". And when they left Egypt too, it was easy for them to remember their nationalism.

The test becomes harder once the crisis is over.

With G-d's help, our crisis too will soon be over. And when the masks and alcohol will once again be Purim accessories, may we continue to remember – and to celebrate – who we really are.

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