Trembling in Awe |

Our generation may take Israel for granted and not appreciate it enough, but anyone who was here in 1948 knows that allowing the miraculous to become ordinary is a crime.

Moshe Yekutiel Alpert, an ultra-Orthodox Jew from the old *yishuv* of Yerushalayim, described in his diary how he went to vote in the first parliamentary elections after the establishment of the State:

“At 05:35, early in the morning, my wife and I got up. After drinking coffee, we wore Shabbat clothes in honor of this great and holy day. For זֶה הַיּוֹם עָשָׂה ה׳, this is the day the L-rd has made. For 2,000 years of exile, and perhaps even since the six days of Creation, we have not merited such a day, upon which we go to the polls to vote in a Jewish State, מִשְׁאָר יָמֵי דַּעַת דַּעַת וְמִשְׁאָר יָמֵי דַּעַת.

...My wife and I and my brother-in-law went to the polls in the area of HaChabashim Street, carrying our little State of Israel ID books. We took the shortcut, and I walked every step in great joy, the way I dance hakafot with a *Sefer Torah* on Simchat Torah, because I had an Israeli ID in my hand. My joy and happiness were boundless. When we arrived, the official brought the ballot box, and the chairman called me and said汉语 彼 此 你 必 尊 重 老 年 人 — “you shall respect the elderly.” Since I was the oldest there, I would be the first to vote.

I went back into the polling station again, and showed everyone that I had only one envelope. And then I experienced the holiest moment of my life, a moment that neither my father nor my grandfather merited. Only me, in my time, in my life, merited such a pure and holy moment. How blessed I am!

I put the envelope into the ballot box, shook hands with the chairman, the deputy and the rest of the committee and left. I waited in the hallway for my wife because she was number 2, and at 06:28, we returned home and I went to pray. It was a day of great celebration!”

VeHadarta |

“On Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron and Yom HaAtzmaut everyone is looking for elderly people to talk to,” writes illustrator Naama Lahav. “Yes, old men and women. For schools, for radio and television interviews, for conferences. Someone who escaped from Treblinka, someone who spent the night in the orchards of the kibbutz, a 10-year-old who immigrated to Israel via an impossible route... Unbelievable stories. We look at these people, and wonder – did they go through all this? What life experience, what cumulative strength, O how much we can learn from them!

I think this is what the Torah meant in three words in Parashat Kedoshim, which we read during this time: וְהָדַרְתָּ פְּנֵי זָקֵן. We’ve known this mitzvah since kindergarten, so much so that perhaps we have forgotten to pay attention to the words. It is not, “you shall care for the elderly,” nor “you shall have sympathy for the elderly,” nor “you shall stand for the old man on the bus.” VeHadarta, respect the elderly. See the majesty (hidur) in his face. Not only on special days, but throughout the year, take care to respect, elevate and glorify the elders in our society. Respect every year and every wrinkle.”

What Unites Us? |

Between barbecues and the annual torch-lighting ceremony, the *חִידוֹן הַתָּנָך* , the World Bible Quiz, has also become one of the symbols of Yom HaAtzmaut. Excited teenagers from all over the world take to the stage to test their knowledge of the Book of Books. When Yuli Edelstein served as Speaker of the Knesset, he was also Chairman of the Judges for the quiz. One year, he gave a speech in which he shared his experiences as a Prisoner of Zion:

“I look at you, the contestants. You are from the United States, Panama, Mexico, Belarus, South Africa... I am...
looking at you and soon translators will come up here to translate the questions, because you do not even have a common language between you... So what unites you all?

I was once a Prisoner of Zion. I lived in a country that, Baruch Hashem, no longer exists – the Soviet Union. I taught Hebrew and Judaism. I did not have knowledge like yours, but I knew a little, and that was enough to teach other Jews in secret. It did not end well. I was put in jail and then in a labor camp. I was completely disconnected. I knew nothing about what was happening outside, beyond the barbed wire fence, at the end of the world in Siberia. One day we returned from hard labor in the woods. After 11 hours in the freezing cold, I crossed the camp with a row of inmates when the officer in charge of discipline – a man you wanted to avoid – called me out.

I approached him and he said: ‘Just so you know, the safe in my room is full of letters for you from all over the world.’ Then he smiled such a sadistic smile and said: ‘By law, you are not allowed to receive letters from abroad and you will not see a single letter.’

No-one could have been happier than I was at that moment.

He didn’t know it, but thanks to him I suddenly learned that Jews from all over the world were writing me letters. It seemed to me that in Parashat Kedoshim we have part of the answer. We may know the verses by heart, but in Iyar we can read them again as the basis for building a regenerated Jewish society. Here are just a few examples:

• קדשים יהיו – You shall be holy.
• ודרקון וורק – You shall respect the elderly.
• לא תגנבו – You shall not steal.
• ולא תשתפשים – neither shall you lie to any of your neighbors.
• לא תטעש את דינו – You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him.
• לא תם עיר ולא תחתך מעשה – Do not put a stumbling block before the blind.
• דרכי תשמש ומשמש – Do not pervert justice.
• בצדיק תשמש ומשמש – Judge your neighbor justly.
• ולא תחל רוחל במשים – You shall not gossip among your people.
• לא תתן את אימים לבכם – You shall not hate your brother in your heart.
• ואהבת לרעך קרום – Love your neighbor as yourself.

Sounds like an excellent manifesto for the glory of the State of Israel.

For the Glory of the State of Israel | Perhaps we should ask Israel the typical birthday question: What do you want to be when you grow up? After birth and adolescence, after the wondrous physical construction of the State, where are you going now? What are your aspirations and goals? It seems to me that in Parashat Kedoshim we have part of the answer. We may know the verses by heart, but in Iyar we can read them again as the basis for building a regenerated Jewish society. Here are just a few examples:

• קדשים יהיו – You shall be holy.
• ודרקון וורק – You shall respect the elderly.

Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir are popular Israeli media personalities and World Mizrachi’s Scholars-in-Residence.