



The Ringing of the Bells

Parsha Pekudai

I had a chance to stay in Tiberius about thirty years ago. The Kaliver Rebbe would stay there occasionally; he established his institutions there and work to disseminate Torah in the city.

Once, while I was in his presence, we were standing and admiring the beauty of the Kinnereth, the Sea of Galilee, of which our sages have said: "And why was it called Kinnereth? Because its fruits are sweet like the music of a harp (kinnor)".¹ What poetry!

"What are those lights?" the Rebbe pointed across the Kinnereth. I told him it was Kibbutz Ein Gev. "That's a Jewish community?" the Rebbe showed interest. I offered to hire a boat and to cross the lake, to see the Kibbutz for himself.

We hired a small boat and crossed the Kinnereth to the other side. We walked amongst the Kibbutz's empty streets, and came upon a child. The Rebbe asked the boy: "Where is the *Shul* (synagogue) here?". The boy answered innocently, "We don't have one here". The Rebbe cried out in response: "How can that be? Jews living in Israel without a *Shul*? Who's in charge here?"

I told the Rebbe that we should turn to the Kibbutz secretariat for an answer. In those days the secretary was Muki Tzur, an author, a leading figure in the Kibbutz movement and a head of the Kibbutz industry.

The Rebbe focused his gaze on Muki and asked him from depths of his heart: "There is no *Shul* here? How can that be? I survived the furnaces of Auschwitz, I witnessed Jews who gave their lives for their Creator, and how can it be that a place of residents in Israel lacks a place of prayer?"

I explained to the stunned Muki that the Rebbe has experienced the terrors of the Holocaust and his life work and aspirations were to spread Judaism throughout the world. "How can I help?" Muki inquired. I immediately suggested that we hold a Melavah Malka for all the Kibbutz members, with song and Torah teachings. Muki agreed and set a date for the next Motzaei Shabbos (Saturday night).

On Motzaei Shabbos we traversed the Kinnereth and the entire community awaited us on the dock. It was an exhilarating sight of *Kiddush Hashem* (the sanctification of G-d's name) which I will never forget. We turned to the dining hall. At its entrance I extracted a Mezuzah from my *Kapotah* and the Rebbe said the blessing: "Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to affix a Mezuzah". Everyone replied with an excited "Amen" as the Rebbe fixed the Mezuzah to the doorpost. I saw them cover their heads with their hands and look upon the scene with a reverence they were not accustomed to.

The crowd took its places, but one woman remained standing and sobbed bitterly. With tears on her cheeks, she told us of her remarkable journey. She was a Holocaust survivor herself who tried to suppress her past, but now everything surfaced. "I had such dear parents; I am ashamed to face them. We observed the Mitzvos with total devotion in those days". Her voice became constricted and made the heart quiver.

I stood before them trembling and with immense exhilaration: "Dear Jews, we have the Kaliver Rebbe present with us, a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov.² The Baal Shem Tov has taught us a great lesson, to believe in every Jew. There is no such

thing as a disconnected Jew! Every Jew is connected to the heavens above; we are all believers and the decedents of believers".

The crowd applauded. Then the Rebbe stood up and sung with much devotion and with closed eyes: "You generously give man wisdom". The audience was very much moved. Circles of dancers were formed and the song "Israel, trust in G-d" was sung for many hours.

I realized that this was a proper moment and announced that anyone who is interested in a Mezuzah should add his name to a list, and we would acquire one for him. Nearly thirty people added their name to the list.

On our way back, I told the Rebbe that we learn in this week's Parsha about the High Priest's ritual garments: "And they made bells of pure gold, and they placed the bells in the midst of the pomegranates all around on the bottom hem of the robe".³

The ritual instruments of the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) and the garments of the High Priest have deep meanings concealed within them and teach us lessons on how we should conduct ourselves on daily basis. The azure of the priest's robe denotes to the heavens above, the bells and pomegranates on its hem signify the Jewish souls who originate from the heavens.

I told this to the Rebbe, and added that some Jews are like a bell; their voices are heard in prayer and the study of Torah. There are others who seem to be hollow as a pomegranate. It is not a coincidence that our sages have stated: "Even the least worthy are full of religious performances like a pomegranate".⁴ To our eyes the pomegranate seems hollow, but that is not so, and rather they are likewise connected to sanctity and to the source of all things.

The Torah teaches us to integrate the golden bells, those devout Jews who cling to Torah and Mitzvos, together with the seemingly hollow pomegranates. It is not enough for any single Jew to be filled with Torah and good deeds and to stop at that, because all Jews are accountable for each other and are vested with the responsibility to bring every Jew closer to Judaism. Things are such because it is unthinkable to see our brethren's circumstances and to stay indifferent as we see that they are disconnected from a life of Mitzvos.

The Rebbe smiled to me, and the gentle waves of the Kinnereth testified as thousands witnesses to the fact that we ourselves have fulfilled the linking of the bells to the pomegranates.

The next day I crossed the Kinnereth for the third time and brought to the Kibbutz the thirty promised Mezuzos. On the dock was waiting a Holocaust survivor, Baruch Ze'ira, a Satmar Chasid before the war, who in turbulent times has ended up in Kibbutz Ein Gev. He asked of me that he would be the one who would merit the affixing the Mezuzos throughout the Kibbutz. I gave him the Mezuzos and taught him the relevant laws concerning the affixing of the Mezuzos.

A while after Baruch wrote me an animated letter accounting his mission. "There were those for whom I affixed the Mezuzah myself and there were those who asked me to site the blessing with them and affixed it themselves". He concluded his letter stating: "The Kibbutz members who do not know and have not experienced religious Judaism are longing for you..."

Even many years later, every time I meet brigadier general (res.) Effi Eitam, a native of Ein Gev and a former minister in the Israeli Government, he reminds me of that Saturday night. In its merit, he tells me, he began his path towards Judaism

¹ Tractate Megilah, 6a.

² Rabbi Yisroel ben Eliezer, was a 18th century [Jewish mystical rabbi](#). He is considered to be the founder of [Hasidic Judaism](#)

³ Shmot, 39, 25.

⁴ Tractate Megilah, 6a.