



Parshas Bamidbar

A Jew's Lament in a Monastery

Leilui Neshmas Meira Chaya Nechama Bracha A"H

Bat David Mordechai V'Zelda Shaindel Sheychu

During the Ten Days of Repentance I received in my house a distinguished individual who was weeping uncontrollably. He explained that his son who lives in Europe had sent his son to study in Israel. His grandson had rented an apartment in the center of Israel with a few friends, soon it became apparent that one of the friends was in fact a missionary. He proselytized and was successful in drawing the youngster towards Christianity. "Do you know where your grandson is?" I asked the tearful grandfather. "Yes", he replied, "The missionary's trail leads to a monastery in *Deer Chanah*".

I turned pale when I heard the name of the town. How did he get there? *Deer Chanah* was a Muslim town, with a monastery at the edge of the town. To even approach such a place, a person would have to overcome many obstacles. This was not like walking into a "disco" even in the worst of areas in Israel.

The grandfather's crying was incessant, "How can I pray on Yom Kippur when my grandson is in a monastery?"

I had a close relationship with the Supervisor of the Northern District of the Ministry of Interior, Yisrael Kenig. I turned to him and requested assistance.

Kenig promised to speak to the town *Muchtar*; the town leader, to insure my safe passage. I met with the *Muchtar* the next day. He explained that he had no

influence in the monastery for he is a Muslim, but his son was responsible for the provision of supplies to the monastery and he would take me there.

The *Muchtar* added that my garb would expose me and would spoil any chance to approach the monastery. Realizing that I may need to travel incognito, I produced a pair of Jeans, a wig and a shirt that hid most of my beard, the *Muchtar* was amazed when he saw the transformation. Thus, I climbed on to the tractor and rode with the bread and vegetables on the way to the monastery.

I pondered the appropriateness of actually entering a monastery, a place of an alien religion, a place where Jews are prohibited to enter.

The righteous throughout the generations have taught us that when one is in distress he should focus on the image of a *Tzadik*, a saintly person. I contemplated on the image of my Rebbe, Rabbi Moshe Mordechai of Lelov. I remembered a magnificent teaching of his. In our Parsha it is stated: "The *Nasse*, the prince of the

children of Manasseh, was Gamliel the son of Pedahzur".¹ The Rebbe elucidated – the *Nasse* – literally meaning someone who is held at high esteem (by the), *the children of Manasseh* – sons who have forgotten their G-d, *Manasseh* deriving from the word forgetfulness, *Gamliel* - (he) (which literally means) brings them closer, and to a state where they too admit that they have a G-d, *Pedahzur* – he is one who redeems G-d and extracts him from exile. It is a great deed to bring one closer to G-d, and it is tantamount to have redeemed G-d Himself as it were.²

The realization of this concept was quit startling. I looked at the costume I was wearing and smiled in embarrassment. I remembered the wondrous words of the Talmud in Tractate Baba Metzia about Rebbe arriving at Rabbi Tarfon's town: "Rebbe chanced to visit the town of R. Tarfon. Said he to them: 'Has that righteous man (R. Tarfon)...left a son?' They replied: 'He has left no son, but a daughter's son remains, and every harlot who is hired for two zuzim hires him for eight.' So he had him brought before him and said to him: 'Should you repent, I will give you my daughter.' He repented... And why did Rebbe take such extreme measures? — because, as Rab Judah said in Rab's name...: He who teaches Torah to his neighbor's son will be privileged to sit in the Heavenly Academy".³

Rebbe understood that in order to save a Jewish soul one must be willing to pay a price, even something which is dear and precious. I said to myself "if you are redeeming G-d from exile, you should not nitpick about wearing jeans or entering gloomy places".

I entered the monastery using my broken English. They did not suspect a thing, they assumed a new resident had arrived. I searched for the young man, and entered a side room after finding him. I closed the door behind us and removed my disguise.

"Rabbi Grossman?" he gaped at me, absolutely incredulous to the sight of this rabbi wearing jeans and a wig instead of his normal Chassidic grab, "What are you doing here?"

"And what are you doing here?" I responded in kind. He bowed his head in shame. I told him: you should know that your grandfather, a Holocaust survivor, who survived the camps with immense self-sacrifice, cannot find consolation for the injustice you have done to him.

¹ Bamidbar, 2,20.

² The entire teaching is a play on the words of the verse in Hebrew, giving a different understanding to the initial basic reading of the verse.

³ Tractate Baba Metzia, 85a.

The young man started weeping silently, claiming that his family had mistreated him terribly. I told him that I understood, but nonetheless he had gone too far. "We are now in the Ten Days of Repentance. It is only two days until Yom Kippur. How can you be in this place?"

I tried to persuade him to join me at Migdal Ha'Emek at least for the Holy day of Yom Kippur. He replied, saying: "I eat on Yom Kippur". He was testing my reaction. I replied, stating that I have a refrigerator full of food; all he needs to do is come...

He did not commit himself to anything. I laid an assuring hand on his shoulder, and told him: "Remember that you're a son of the Jewish Nation". I went out to the waiting tractor. When I returned home I told his Grandfather that I was successful in making contact, but the grandson did not follow me out, the grandfather was incensed, he said that he could not forgive me for having met his grandson and nonetheless left him behind. I consoled and encouraged him, I said do not worry - he will return.

The entire day leading up to Yom Kippur, I truly expected the young man to materialize at any moment. But the time to go to the synagogue had arrived and the grandson was nowhere to be seen. I walked to the "Kol Nedrei" prayers with a heavy heart.

At the conclusion of Yom Kippur I received an excited phone call from the grandfather. "He has returned". As the Holy day commenced he appeared suddenly at the grandfather's home, full of remorse and repentance.

Years later, I entered a *Shul* in Monsey. I was approached by one of the Yeshivah students, his face looked familiar, he was wearing different garb than when we had last met; but then again so was I, he approached me and whispered in my ear: "Rabbi Grossman, where is your wig?"