

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook – “The 19th Psalm of the State of Israel” (May, 1967)

Translated by Rhea Magnes

We are accustomed from time to time - we must become accustomed - to act in accordance with the closing lines of Psalm 107 - that Psalm which the Rabbanim have decreed we are to say on Israel's Independence Day:

"Those saw the works of the L-rd / And His wonders in the deep. / The upright see it, and are glad; / And all iniquity stoppeth her mouth. / Whoso is wise let him observe these things, / And let them consider the mercies of the L-rd." (Ps. 107:24;42-43).

The upright see "the works of the L-rd". If only we might win the right to be numbered amongst the "righteous and upright", in the words of the Natziv [famous rabbi]. And to the degree that uprightness is lacking - so too is the ability to see and recognize "the works of the L-rd". We must observe much, we must consider much the works of G-d and the workings of Divine Providence. We must look into our own inner life, we must examine the life of Klal Israel. We must open our eyes and discover the wonders of G-d's Torah and of His works.

...Nineteen years ago, on the night when news of the United Nations decision in favor of the Reestablishment of the State of Israel reached us, when the People streamed into the streets to celebrate and rejoice, I could not go out and join in the jubilation. I sat alone and silent; a burden lay upon me. During those first hours I could not resign myself to what had been done. I could not accept the fact that indeed "they have...divided My land." (Joel 4:2) Yes [and now after nineteen years] where is our Hebron - have we forgotten her?! Where is our Shechem, our Jericho, - where? - Have we forgotten them? And all that lies beyond the Jordan - each and every clod of earth, every region, hill, valley, every plot of land, that is part of Eretz Israel - have we the right to give up even one grain of the Land of G-d?! --- On that night, nineteen years ago, during those hours, as I sat trembling in every limb of my body, wounded, cut, torn to pieces - I could not then rejoice.

The next day HaGaon HaRav Y. M. Harlapp came to our house - he felt the need to come and how could he not come? We sat together, the two of us, in that small hallowed room in "Beit HaRav" [the room that had been the study of HaRav Zvi Yehudah's father, HaRav Avraham HaCohen Kook] - where else if not there - we sat shocked and silent. Finally, regaining our strength, we said, the two of us as one: "This is the L-rd's doing; / It is marvelous in our eyes." (Ps. 118:23).

...as to the nations and their deliberations concerning Israel there comes to my mind this incident: In the latter part of his life HaRav Meir Bar-Ilan was present at an important dinner held by the "Mizrahi", of which he was then the Chairman. Also attending the Dinner was the Chairman of the Jewish Agency, Mr. Berl Locker, who was invited to speak. It was at that time that the debate on the internationalization of Jerusalem was being held at the U.N. Berl Locker mentioned the discussion concerning Jerusalem in his speech, describing it as a delicate problem, requiring much tact and careful treatment, etc.,etc. Upon hearing these words R. Meir burst out in Yiddish, calling out from his seat in a voice of thunder: - "Who is listening to what they are saying - who cares what they think - will they determine for us what we will do in Jerusalem?" - That was the reaction of a political leader imbued with the greatness of spirit that

comes with belief and faith in G-d, instilled with the sacredness of the Eternal Jerusalem, the City of our Holiness and our Glory.

...The question has been asked, "Is this the state that our prophets envisioned?" And I say: This is the state that the prophets envisioned. Of course, it has not yet attained perfection. But our prophets, our sages, and those who followed them, said: The seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will return and will reestablish settlement and independent political rule in the Land. We were not told whether those who return will or will not be men and women of righteousness. The prophet said: "When I shall have gathered the house of Israel...then shall they dwell in their own land...And they shall dwell safely therein, and shall build houses, and plant vineyards..." (Ezek. 28:25-26). The prophet is speaking of real vineyards, not symbolic ones.

Indeed, surely as a result of the return of Israel to their Land there will come about the increase of Torah and its glorification. But the first step is - the settlement of Israel on their Land! HaRav Eliyahu Gutmacher wrote: "It is clear to me that if 130 families of Israel begin to till the land in our holy Eretz - this will be the beginning of the Redemption (Geulah) even if the People are not yet worthy." Certainly this great tzaddik desired the increase of Torah and its glorification, but the order of Redemption is: agricultural settlement, the establishment of the state, and as a consequence - to follow - the uplifting of that which is sacred, the dissemination of the teaching of Torah, its increase and glorification.

...The true Israel is Israel redeemed, the kingdom of Israel and the armies of Israel, a people in its wholeness and not a diaspora in exile. Thus, when Israel was sent into exile heavens and earths throughout the universe trembled. And so it was with the coming of the Geulah (Redemption). A tremor spread through the universe, billowing from step to step until it reached us...The process is gradual and continuous, and each and every year [of Israel's independence] is a new hymn, a celestial song, another link in the chain. This year [1967] we sing the 19th Song.

In the book of Psalms, Psalm 19 is comprised of two sections. In the first section we perceive the wonders of G-d in nature and see Him manifest in the Creation: "The heavens declare the glory of G-d,/And the firmament showeth His handiwork..." (Ps. 19:2).

In the second section G-d's pure and illumining Torah, His Commandment, and the Awesome Fear of G-d are depicted: "The law of the L-rd is perfect, restoring the soul; / The testimony of the L-rd is sure, making wise the simple. / The precepts of the L-rd are right, rejoicing the heart; / The commandment of the L-rd is pure, enlightening the eyes. / The fear of the L-rd is clean, enduring for ever..." (Ps. 19:8-10).

Both the Kuzari [medieval work of Jewish philosophy] and the Maharal [16th century rabbi] expound upon this parallelism: the power of G-d is revealed in the majestic world of nature. But, as we rise in holiness, immense is the measure of the force of His Revelation through the Torah and the Awesome Fear of G-d which has been given to Israel: "And He said unto me: 'Thou art My servant,/Israel in whom I will be glorified.'" (Isa. 49:3). Such is our Psalm 19. From

within our earthly natures we reach out to the spiritual and the heavenly - we build with matter and afterwards consecrate what we have built. We are commanded to occupy ourselves in our earthly abode with the revelation of the holy, in support of the Divine Work of Creation.

"Ascribe ye strength unto G-d;" (Ps. 68:35). "Exalt the L-rd with me, / And let us extol His name together." (Ps. 34:4).

[In saying this] it is not our intent to flatter heretics and Torah scoffers. There are in the State of Israel many grievous things in which there is much hilul ha-Shem [desecration of G-d's Name]...Nonetheless, with all that is shocking from the aspect of desecration, there is much kiddush ha-Shem [sanctification of G-d's Name] which cannot, by any account, be set aside in relation to the State and Israel's Day of Independence.

In Ezekiel, Chapter 36, the program for Redemption is set out:

"And I will sanctify My great name..." this will come about because "I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land." Only afterwards will come "And I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your uncleannesses...And I will...cause you to walk in my statutes..." (Ezek. 36:23-26). The repentance of the People will come only after the Ingathering of the Exiles.

At first glance it would appear that there is a balance between the kiddush haShem involved in the building of the kingdom of Israel, on the one hand, and the hilul haShem involved on the other. But we are instructed by the Sages in the Talmud Yerushalmi that "kiddush haShem is greater than hilul haShem". Certainly the significance of this saying of the Sages is not an injunction that kiddush haShem is of more importance than hilul haShem. Rather the explanation is that when both are present together, when in the same matter there is to be found an aspect of kiddush haShem and an aspect of hilul haShem, then one does not say this case is doubtful, we are at an impasse. For the aspect of kiddush haShem is prominent, decisive and obligatory. How much more is this so in the great, divine kiddush haShem involved in the Rebirth of Klal Israel.

And, as the fulfillment of the mitzvah of the Settlement of Eretz Israel continues to grow within our midst, as the tens of thousands of Israel are gathered within the Land, out of the completeness and greatness of faith in the realization of the "works of the L-rd", we may attain the right to see desecrations and profanations (hilulei haShem) gradually be abolished and disappear.

"And the rugged shall be made level, / And the rough place a plain; / And the glory of the L-rd shall be revealed; / And all flesh shall see it together; / For the mouth of the L-rd hath spoken it." (Isa. 40:4-5).

(translated by Rhea Magnes)