

MAYGA: Make Am Yisroel Great Again

1.) Torah Study: For a Jew, the first step in any path of improvement is always going to involve Torah study. In the spiritual ladder of Rav Pinchas Ben Yair, Torah study is the first step that leads to subsequent higher spiritual levels such as 'carefulness' and 'zeal'. In order to restore the lost glory of Judaism, we must understand the Jew's most holy book, the Torah, intimately. A Jew who studies Torah regularly connects to Judaism in an intellectual, spiritually dynamic way. He asks questions. He regularly learns new ideas that stimulate his mind and his soul. He is connected to a living Judaism that is alive and vital. Without strong Torah study, however, even if one attempts to keep the mitzvos, eventually complacency will set in. The mitzvos without Torah study will become a body without a soul which ultimately leads to a dried up Judaism, r'l, that comes across as ritualistic and suffocating. To restore the glory of Judaism one must be regularly connected to Torah study like the air he breathes. For just like a fish cannot live outside of water, so too a Jew cannot achieve real life without Torah study.

Reb Nachman writes in the first piece in Likutei Moharan that Torah study elevates the "*chen*" (*grace*) and "*chasivus*" (*prestige*) of the Jewish people. A Jew who studies Torah has a "*chen*" to him. Others are inspired by his very presence. His mere act of learning reminds all of the great calling of our beloved nation. The great fire of Sinai extends to all generations in the great fire of Torah study!

While all parts of Torah study are of great importance, a special emphasis must be made to the spiritual/foundational elements of Torah study. For if one just learns the details of Torah Study (as critically important as they truly are) he at times may lose sight of the big picture and greater mission of Am Yisroel. This at times can also lead to a "dried up" version of Judaism on some level as well. However, by dedicating ample time, to the more spiritual/foundational parts of Torah study such as Tanach, Macshava, Mussar, Chassidus and Kaballah- one will connect to the greater spiritual dynamic that underlies the Torah and the entire mission of the Jewish people. Learning these types of works can greatly inspire the Jewish soul. They can help Make Am Yisroel Great Again!

2.) Eretz Yisroel: For thousands of years, the Jewish people yearned to return to our holy ancestral land. During our long sojourn amongst the nations of the world we never forgot the place where we came from and the place where we are ultimately meant to return. In the words of the Psalmist, " If I forget Jerusalem, I shall forget my right hand" . However, in recent years something incredible has happened. The Jewish people have started returning to their holy land en masse. This modern day movement began with the students of the Gra and the Baal Shem Tov who returned to the Holy Land with all their might despite great hardship. Sadly, this movement was hijacked to a degree by alien forces who were distant from the true spirit of Israel. However, even so, millions of Jews have returned to Eretz Yisroel from all over the world in recent times. Eretz Yisroel,

despite the great challenges, is the center place for Torah study and Avodas Hashem in the world today. The overwhelming percentage of Gedolei Yisroel live in Eretz Yisroel today. Kibbutz Galus, the returning of the exiles has truly begun with 7 million Jews now living in the holy land and the land blossoming and giving forth fruit in abundance, after many years when it was mostly barren. Just as the blessing in Shemone Esre ,for the gathering of the exiles, comes before the blessing for the ultimate redemption- we see now as well, that there is a strong element of the gathering of the exiles that comes before Mashiach.

למה נגרע! Why are we less! If 7 million Jews are living today in Eretz Yisroel, why can't I also live in Eretz Yisroel as well? For to truly restore the lost glory of Judaism one must ultimately return to the Holy Land. The holiness of the Holy Land ignites the innate holiness of the Jewish soul and helps one live a truly meaningful dynamic form of Avodas Hashem. Studying Torah and performing Mitzvos have a different flavor when done in the Holy Land. The Torah is more pristine. Its secrets are more easily unlocked. The fulfillment of mitzvos appears so much more natural and essential when done in our Holy Land. Of course there are challenges in Eretz Yisroel, but this is the land that Hashem designated for His beloved nation. The Torah mentions over and over again that Hashem took us of Mitzrayim and gave us the Torah in order to perform the mitzvos in His beloved land. In this vein, our Sages tell us that the purpose of Torah and Mitzvos outside of the land is just so we won't forget about them until we return home. The return to the land is the mission of our generation! Millions have already returned. Why can't I too?

My mother for many years would travel back and forth between the exile and Eretz Yisroel. From her unique perspective of regularly experiencing both places, she expressed beautifully the following parable. In Chutz Laretz, a Jew lives like a fish in a fish bowl. However, in Eretz Yisroel one is like a fish in the sea. In Chutz Laaretz, one can create an artificial environment in which he can build a Jewish community. However, everything he does is against the tide on many levels. In Eretz Yisroel, however, the Jewish soul has returned to its natural habitat. The fish has returned to the ocean! And Baruch Hashem in our generation Clall Yisroel has come back to the place where they belong. Because Eretz Yisroel is the ultimate place where we can Make Am Yisroel Great Again!

(Now there are many people currently living in exile who would like to return home. However, there are at times legitimate reasons that may temporarily preclude this dream. Concerns of Parnassah, Chinuch for the children etc are extremely important considerations that at times may legitimately preclude the big move. However, even for those Jews who have legitimate reasons to remain outside of the land-and there are many people who fit in this category-they should still not be remiss in reawakening the true love in their souls for our Holy Land. For who was greater than Moshe Rabenu, who was not allowed to enter the Holy Land. However, Hashem commanded him many times to ascend to Mt Navo and gaze at His beloved land. Why did Hashem do this to Moshe

Rabenu? Was He trying to tease him r"l? The answer is that even though Hashem did not let Moshe Rabenu enter the Holy Land, He still wanted him to have great yearning for the Holy Land. For at times, one can connect to something in a greater way through yearning than by actual physical actualization. For yearning expresses the deepest connection of the neshama and ultimately makes a more profound connection (This is an idea expressed in the writings of the Maharal of Prague). This was the relationship that Moshe Rabenu had with the land and is also the relationship that our brethren in the Diaspora (who may justifiably still be remaining in exile) may also have with the Holy Land. For if one yearns for Eretz Yisroel, then when the opportunity arrives he will make sure to come home. And each Jew who comes back to Eretz Yisroel and keeps the Torah is helping Make Am Yisroel Great Again.)

3.) Kedusha: This is a sensitive topic that may make some people uncomfortable. However, anyone who understands what is going on in our generation, realizes that the main battle the Jewish people are facing now is in this realm. Whether it comes to guarding ones eyes for men or modesty for women, the battle and achievement of kedusha is paramount for living a dynamic Judaism. But lets talk about this topic briefly in a positive way. Kedusha is often translated as 'holiness'. But, like many English translations, the term "holiness" does not really capture the nobility and vital importance that the Hebrew word kedusha truly conveys. The Arizal in Shaar Hagilgulim says that kedusha is "chaim" ,life itself. Because when one guards his kedusha he is connecting deeply to Hashem who is the source of true life! Being vigilant in matters of kedusha protects one from impure forces that can separate a person from true life. The protection of kedusha is a gift that is essential for living a dynamic Judaism. With kedusha the Torah is sweet and mitzvos can be exciting. With Kedusha a person at times can really experience Hashem's presence. Because with kedusha a person experiences the vitality and joy of true life. With kedusha a person can help Make Am Yisroel Great Again!

4.) Expressing Jewish Pride: About 150 years ago or so, the Jewish people began to suffer greatly from a gigantic inferiority complex. This inferiority complex began to express itself in many ways. Jews wanted to look more like the goyim. They wanted names like the goyim. They embraced the culture of the goyim. Put simply, many Jews were embarrassed about their Judaism.

Well, as the descendants of these people we have a big job to fix. The main point I want to make here is not how one does this but the general principle of this topic: Jewish pride was destroyed. We have to restore it and express it in the way we relate to ourselves and the world. Everyone's situation is different and what is right for one person may not be right for the other. For some, restoring the expression of Jewish pride may involve beginning to wear a kippa. For others it may involve wearing a "Magen Dovid" necklace. And for others it may involve growing out their payos. There are many examples. And every person should try to find a way to express Jewish pride in a way that is right for

them. Because by outwardly expressing Jewish pride this can Make Am Yisroel Great Again!

- 5.) **Unity:** Well, this is probably the most important topic on the list and ,not surprisingly, the most difficult. Our Sages say that the Bes Hamikdash was destroyed because of 'baseless hatred". So this is the main thing we have to fix to restore the greatness of our nation!

While the most important and difficult place where this must be achieved is within the Jewish home itself, I would briefly like to talk about this topic on a national level. The Jewish people are made up of many groups. Each group has a slice of our rich spiritual heritage. Each group should certainly rejoice in their portion. However, at the same time, they must realize that they only have a portion. For the complete entirety of 'kedushas Yisroel" only exists within the entirety of the nation. Knesses Yisroel (which is the combination of all of the Jewish people from all of history) contains all of the nation's holiness. However, each group only has a slice of it. Some may have bigger slices than others but it is still only a slice. And here lies the key challenge to Jewish unity. How can a person rejoice in his portion and yet still realize that it is only a portion and simultaneously also respect his friend's portion which might be very different from his. The derech of the Gra, while incredible, does not contain all of kedushas Yisroel. Neither does the derech of the Baal Shem Tov. Each one has a very big slice but not the entirety. If one truly internalizes this, this can lead to true humility and ultimately may pave the way for true Jewish unity. True Jewish unity is achieved by realizing your own "maalos" (positive characteristics) and yet also realizing the positive characteristics that your friend or a different group may possess. Through this, one can begin to live true Jewish unity and help Make Am Yisroel Great Again!

-Ariel

If you found this essay inspiring, please pass it on to a friend. And may we all reach our potential in helping Make Am Yisroel Great Again!