

A Unique People

Rabbi Reuven Mann

In the Shabbat Mincha prayer we recite, “You are One and Your name is One and who is like Your people Israel, a nation *unique on earth*”. This prompts the question, what is so special about the Jewish People?

It seems that the Jews have many rare qualities such as their commitment to learning, desire to be helpful to all humans in their time of need and great family values. This is not a complete listing of Jewish virtue, but there is a special characteristic which I became aware of over the course of Yom Kippur.

The prayerful activities of the day are dominated by the theme of *Vidduy* (Confession). This is recited throughout the day by the individual as well as the prayer leader, who chants the Prayers on behalf of the group. Indeed, we recall how in the days of the Temple Service the Kohen Gadol confessed on behalf of himself, his fellow Kohanim and the entire Congregation of Israel.

And we are not shy about enumerating our sins. There is a long list of transgressions of every kind which most people would prefer to be silent about. But we recount them in glorious detail. And it's not just the baser elements of the tribe who “come clean”. Everyone, even the most exalted Rabbis and role models of our community, verbalize the same confession.

In my opinion, the readiness to acknowledge sin is one of the ways in which Judaism stands apart from the other religions. Our religion recognizes that nothing is more consequential to the moral perfection of man than *Teshuva*. Man is prone to act in a sinful manner, but Hashem gave him the ability to look into himself and change course. The key issue is whether he has the courage and honesty to admit his transgressions.

This is no easy task. The prophet, Nathan, had to apprise King David that he had sinned with the wife of Uriah. He could not approach the topic directly but contrived a fictional case which mirrored David's trespass and only when the King asked, “who is that man?” did Nathan retort, “You are the man”.

There is great resistance to fully acknowledging wrongful behavior, but spiritual growth and progress cannot take place unless one overcomes that. Judaism demands that every member of the Jewish people as well as the community itself engage in introspective soul-searching and confession on its holiest day of the year.

What other people or religion has a similar requirement? Does America have a designated time to repent and seek atonement for its enslavement of the Blacks and its terrible treatment of the “Native Americans”? And what about egregious blunders which unnecessarily cost the lives and limbs of numerous young soldiers, such as the Vietnam War?

America is not the only country which must fess up to severely irrational conduct which produced disasters. Millions of lives were lost in World War II, which could have been avoided had the Western

nations recognized the true danger of Hitler and dealt with him before he could do real harm. They failed to prepare their own countries for war and when it came were unable to fight properly. The policy of appeasement which was assiduously pursued by Chamberlain and others brought disaster to the Western nations.

Yet no one is taken to task and forced to confront his errors and stupidities. As a result, the mistaken notions at the heart of disastrous policies go uncorrected and history repeats itself. This can be seen in America's attempts to deal with the Iran nuclear threat through "agreements" which are woefully inadequate to avert the dreaded catastrophe.

And what about the crime of the Holocaust, does anyone confess his sin and the role he might have played in doing nothing to oppose this tragedy? Both the perpetrators and bystanders are guilty. Yet I am not aware of any country which has a national day of reckoning in which they reflect on their inexcusable behaviors and strive to rectify them.

This has the greatest relevance to the prime criminal, Germany. That country is guilty of the most atrocious crime in human history. At the very least, a day should be set aside for acknowledging the horrendous atrocities and seeking out the corrupt attitudes that led to them.

The Jews are not the only people who have sinned and need to do *Teshuva*. What makes them different is that they recognize this imperative and honor it. In that sense, they are truly a "unique nation on earth". May we continuously strive to honor and be worthy of that exalted description.

Shabbat Shalom V'Chag Succot Sameach.

Dear Friends,

My newest book, *Eternally Yours: G-d's Greatest Gift To Mankind on VaYikra* was recently published, and is now available at: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B09SHRXS3Q>

I hope that my essays will enhance your reading and study of the Book of VaYikra and would greatly appreciate a brief review on Amazon.com.

Additionally, for those in *Eretz Yisrael*, my books are available at David Linden's bookstore located at Emek Refaim Street 21, Jerusalem and at Pomeranz Book store, Be'eri 5 Jerusalem. They are very nice stores to visit and browse.

—Rabbi Reuven Mann