NAZA and YOM KIPPUR: Not Everything Is Forgivable

THE FIRST TRAITORS

The Amidah, the central prayer of Jewish liturgy, originally had eighteen blessings. One more was added in the time of Rabban Gamliel. Thirteen of the blessings are requests. We ask HaShem for understanding, forgiveness, health, livelihood, justice, redemption, and much more. But the added request is surprising.

In the Sephardic text, this berakha opens with the words *laminim velamalshinim al tehi tikva*: "Let there be no hope for the heretics and the informers." The two usually go together: betraying the covenant with God and betraying one's own people. This request is unlike all the others. We ask nothing for ourselves. We ask for nothing material. We ask God to protect us from the enemy within.

The Talmud (Berakhot 28b) tells us that after the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash, around the year 90 CE, the Sages gathered in Yavne. Rabban Gamliel asked for this new request to be composed and added to the sacred text of the Amidah. That was extraordinary.

Rabban Gamliel dared to change a liturgical structure set by the Sages and prophets of Israel. Why? Because a new problem had appeared. The Jewish people had lost their sovereignty. They no longer had their own judges or courts. They lived under Rome, which had no sympathy for Jews. In this new reality, a Jew could bring an accusation against another Jew before the imperial authorities and put his freedom, his property, and even his life at risk. The Jewish community had no jurisdiction over the accuser. In normal times, when a

rabbinic court existed and a conflict arose between Jews, the case was judged by the rules of the Torah: solid evidence, and witnesses who appeared with their faces uncovered, before anyone could be condemned.

Now, if a Jew went to the Romans to accuse another Jew, as in the story of Kamtsa and Bar Kamtsa, everything was turned upside down. The accused lost the presumption of innocence. The informer gained an "extraordinary right": near-total credibility.

Why?

Because an accusation against Jews made by a non-Jew could raise suspicion. Maybe there was hatred, antisemitism, or money involved. But an accusation made by a Jew carried special weight. And the Roman authorities, always eager to feed their anti-Jewish propaganda, received it as a gift on a silver platter: "If a Jew informs on a Jew, it must be true."

YOUR SLANDER IS ALL I NEED

The heretic and informer could also profit from his betrayal. He could gain protection from the authorities, money, revenge, prestige, or simply the pleasure of destroying a fellow Jew with almost no effort. The Jews, for their part, had no legal means to stop or punish the traitor, or to undo the damage.

Our Sages called the one who slandered his own people a *malshin*, an informer, or a *moser*: literally, "one who hands over," a collaborator with the enemy. The *malshinim* became an extraordinary danger, the greatest threat to the collective survival of the Jewish people. This problem outweighed every other need of the nation. So our Sages created a new "national request" and placed it in the Amidah. When the community had no power to defend itself against a traitor, the only thing left was to appeal to Heaven. And they did it officially and permanently, not as a temporary measure, because they

understood this would not be the last time the Jewish people faced this reality.

This berakha is a permanent reminder. It does not sit in history books or in some minor law code. It sits at the heart of our religious life: in the Amidah, the prayer we say with the greatest solemnity, three times a day.

NON-COLLATERAL DAMAGE

A few days ago, Jews around the world were shaken. A documentary called *NAZA*, from the Hebrew *nezek agavi*, "collateral damage," a title that in English or Spanish inevitably sounds like a blend of GAZA and NAZI, won the Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival after an extraordinary standing ovation of nearly 25 minutes.

It was made by two Israeli Jewish journalists from the far left. The film claims that during the Gaza war, the war that began with the massacre of October 7, the Israeli army deliberately authorized the killing of large numbers of innocent civilians, used artificial intelligence to choose targets, and did nothing to reduce civilian deaths. In other words, the film hands antisemites the ammunition they need for the absurd charge of "genocide" against Israel.

The film relies on anonymous testimony from alleged Israeli "soldiers." They speak Hebrew but do not identify themselves. The accusations come without dates, without places, and without any verifiable identity behind them. They would not stand up in any court. The Israeli army has rejected them: the witnesses describe situations in which, by definition, they took no part, and the decision to strike or not strike a target is made by people, not by artificial intelligence. But who cares about checking evidence or asking about the accusers' motives? The Europeans infected with the "deicide" virus (the Jews killed a god) and twenty centuries of cultural antisemitism? Or the open supporters of Islamism? For them,

few things are more appealing than a blood libel against the Jews issued by Jews themselves.

What price will we pay for this act of betrayal and slander? And who will pay it, while the *malshinim* enjoy fame and glory? Our brave soldiers, the ones who risk their lives to defend us?

WHO NEEDS CONTEXT?

NAZA does not only slander the Israeli army. It also erases the context that explains why this war began. A few days ago, Bill Maher, an American TV host, said on his show that what Israel did in Gaza was not genocide but a counterattack, and he questioned the use of the word "genocide" as if October 7 had never happened. He told his guest, an anti-Zionist influencer: "If you want the Jews to stop killing people in Gaza, stop attacking them."

The Europeans who applauded the documentary should spend another 45 minutes of their precious time watching a different one: the real footage of October 7, filmed by the murderers themselves. There are no anonymous witnesses there and no covered faces. There are names, images, places, times, and identifiable facts. Perhaps it is time to show that material, horrific as it is, as a small counterweight to slander presented entirely without the context of October 7.

THE MOST CAREFUL ARMY IN THE WORLD

A few days ago I listened to John Spencer, an urban warfare expert at the Modern War Institute at West Point. He has spent years studying combat in cities and has followed Gaza closely. His comparisons are worth knowing. In the battle of Mosul, in 2016 and 2017, about 100,000 Iraqi troops, backed by the US-led coalition and overwhelming air superiority, needed roughly nine months to drive a few thousand ISIS fighters out of a single city. Thousands of civilians died. Spencer holds that

the ratio of combatants to civilians killed in Gaza has been exceptionally low for urban warfare on this scale, and he has argued again and again that Israel took extraordinary measures to reduce civilian casualties. His conclusion is blunt: in his analysis, Israel did more to prevent civilian deaths than any other army he has studied in comparable conditions.

Those of us who know Israel's soldiers know the enormous risks they take with their own lives to reduce civilian casualties on the enemy's side. That is the exact opposite of what this film shows.

But for the antisemite, European or Islamist, the favorite Jew is the small Jew: subdued, defeated, weak, and humiliated. What he cannot stand is a Jew who is free and strong, who defends himself and wins. The engine of modern anti-Zionism, which is modern antisemitism, is the refusal to tolerate a Jewish state that defends itself, strikes back, and prevails.

So there is one last resort. Yes, the Jews win. But they win because they are "genocidal," because they are "baby killers." Israeli soldiers are the modern world's new "deicides." And the Gazans are the innocent figures in a peaceful nativity scene.

LET GOD DEAL WITH THEM

וְלַמַּלְשִׁינִים אַל תְּהִי תִקְוָה וְכָל רִשְׁעָה כְּרֶגַע תֹּאבֵד וְכָל אוֹיְבֶיךָ מְהֵרָה יִכָּרֵתוּ וְהַזֵּדִים מְהֵרָה תְעַקֵּר וְתְשַׁבֵּר וְתַכְנִיעַ בִּמְהֵרָה בְיָמֵינוּ. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ שׁוֹבֵר אוֹיְבִים וּמַכְנִיעַ זֵדִים.

Let there be no salvation and no escape for the traitors and the informers. Let those who act with treachery disappear, and let every evil force that seeks to destroy Your people be broken and brought down.

Notice something striking. Here the Amidah does not ask HaShem

that these people repent, admit their error, ask forgiveness, and be redeemed. The text leaves no door open. Because this is not only about religious heretics. It is about something far more serious: people who betray their own nation. This unusual request asks that they be cut off, separated from our people, and that justice come from the hand of Bore Olam.

Why such extreme language?

Because the damage done by a Jew who uses his Jewishness to give the world credibility for an accusation against his own people cannot be repaired. It is national, collective damage. It cannot be undone.

And against this enemy within, we are defenseless. Powerless. There is nothing we can do when slander comes from inside. What are we going to say? That there are antisemitic Jews? So in this blessing we demand justice from God. It is a very harsh text. It does not say “Make them understand.” It does not say “Make them change.” It says much more: free us from them, and You bring justice, *bimhera beyamenu*, as soon as possible. Before they do more harm.

THE AMIDAH AS TESTIMONY

Three times a day we say *laminim velamalshinim al tehi tikva*. Our Sages understood how serious this danger is, and they engraved it at the heart of the Amidah so that we would never forget the threat of betrayal from within. Those who hand their people over to the enemy have crossed a line of no return. They are no longer on our side. They are on the other side. Not everything is forgivable. But it does not go unpunished. It is left to Divine justice. That Justice knows the dates, the places, the evidence, and who is behind the covered face. It knows what lies in the deepest corners of the human heart. It knows the good and the wicked. The one who protects and the one who attacks. The one who builds and the one who destroys. The one who loves his people and the one who

betrays them. And it will deal with them.