

Aikev 5774

BS"D Parashat Aikev 5774

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The Game Changes

Starting with the "Three Weeks" we pounded the Hamas wing of Amalek from the air, from the ground and from the sea. The damage to their infrastructure and manpower is horrific, despite their demented, hallucinatory claims to the contrary. When the leadership comes up from the tunnels in which they are hiding and see the devastation that has been wrought upon them by the "Yahud," in addition to the abject failure of their missiles, rockets and invasion tunnels to do more than minimal damage, their hate will increase, their insanity will grow exponentially, as they realize in their heart of hearts that the God of Israel is real, while their alla is buried deep in their illusions.

In this period, with special emphasis on the "Nine Days" (from the beginning of the month of Av to Tisha Be'Av), we witnessed not just a rare historic phenomena, but a game changing one which could have been programmed only by HaShem.

The United States, the Security Council of the UN, and other champions of human rights were begging, beseeching, threatening etc., the Jewish Medina to stop pounding the goyim. History was turned on its head, for historically, this nine day period has been a devastating one for us. But now we have arisen from the ravages of our 2000 year exile to return home to create a remarkable society. A society which is the

envy of the enlightened world. A society which engulfs a multitude of opinions and philosophies so baffling to the stranger, yet we become like one heart and one man in fraternity, love and devotion in times of war and stress. From out of this society we have forged the most lethal and effective military machine for its size in the world. But also the most moral.

The gentile cannot unravel the age old puzzle called "the Jew". And here is where the hate begins. For contrary to the popular adage "If you can't beat them – join them," when it comes to the Jews the goy believes "Since we cannot join them – let's beat them". And in the final analysis every one of all the world's infamous anti-Semites did not "join us" nor were they able to "beat us".

The haters of God's chosen people are like the ocean waves, where each one rushes to inundate the land, and crashes down on arrival, but is followed by another wave which is certain that it will succeed in overwhelming the land, and it too crashes into the sands of time.

However we have a problem.

The establishment of the Medina was a giant step forward towards the final redemption of the Jewish nation. The miracles of the Six Day War and Yom Kippur War were further evidence that HaShem is now involved in returning His children home. However, it appears that we are in a period of semi-stagnation, where the previous fast forward movements have stalled.

Where are today's Jews, the descendants of the millions who for 2000 years prayed daily for our return home?

The answer can be found in the history of the date on which I am writing these words – the 15th of Menachem Av.

Border Guards Withdrew, but No One Came

The Mishna in Tractate Ta'anit states: "There were no happier days (*yamim tovim*) than Yom Kippur and the 15th of Av."

In Tractate Ta'anit of the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds our sages state that the reason Yom Kippur is a *yom tov* is obvious, for on this day our sins are eradicated. However, they ask, what transpired on the 15th of Av to elevate it to the level of happiness of Yom Kippur?

The Gemara explains that on this day Hoshea ben Ela, King of the Northern tribes of Israel, rescinded the edict prohibiting the Jews of the northern tribes to go up to Yerushalayim.

In order to fully appreciate what this meant, we have to go back 300 years prior to the time of Hoshea ben Ela.

The arch-evil Yeravam ben Nevat incited the people of the northern tribes to secede from the union that had begun with King Shaul, followed by King David, King Shlomo and the then king Rechav'am, son of Shlomo Ha'melech.

In order to complete the secession, Yeravam began interpreting the Torah to suit his purposes, thereby creating the first reform movement; however, the formal act of secession was accomplished by closing the roads to Yerushalayim. Yeravam created two substitute spiritual centers, in Bet El and Dan in the north, knowing that as long as the connection to Yerushalayim existed, his breakaway nation would not endure. Yeravam imposed a harsh prohibition on going to Yerushalayim, and placed police along the entire border. This situation continued for over 300, during which time the Jews of the north were severed from Yerushalayim and the Holy Temple.

Upon ascending the throne, Hoshea ben Ela withdrew the border guards and opened the way to Yerushalayim— and this happened on the 15th of Av. Indeed, this was a day to parallel Yom Kippur, for now the Jews would be able to offer korbanot in the Mikdash and achieve atonement for their sins.

After this explanation in the Talmud, Rav Kahana asks: If Hoshea ben Ela was such a great man, how did Hashem permit the Assyrians to invade the northern tribes in his time and exile all the northern Jews? The Talmud answers that Hoshea ben Ela opened the way to Yerushalayim – BUT NO ONE CAME. The people were punished for not renewing their covenant with the Holy City, and Hoshea ben Ela was punished because he did not use his authority to coerce his subjects to do so.

The Gemara explains that in the 300 years when pilgrimage to the Holy City was prohibited by the various kings, the heavenly court could not accuse the people of the north of neglecting their responsibilities to Yerushalayim. However, now that the King opened the way, the people no longer had an excuse for not going. It was as if HaShem was saying, “You did not come to My house, so I will eject you from your houses.”

Rabbis’ Day

Many societies establish specific days for paying homage to outstanding events or people. There is Fathers’ Day, Mothers’ Day, Presidents’ Day, etc. I would humbly suggest adding one more such day, to be called “Rabbis’ Day.”

It would be a time when congregations could express their gratitude to their dedicated, hardworking rabbis and rebbetzins, and for convening of conventions to discuss issues of mutual interest for the advancement of their rabbinic

duties.

I even have a date for this annual event – the above mentioned Tu B'Av (15th of Av).

My reason for choosing this date is as follows:

In Jewish life, the number 15 is ionic in nature (a term used to describe a radical atom or molecule which aspires for stability by attaching itself to another radical atom or molecule). For the number 15 seeks to connect to another 15, in order to achieve stability.

For example:

Within the Holy Temple, there were 15 steps leading up from the *Ezrat Nashim* (the Women's Court) to the area called *Ezrat Yisrael* (the Court of Israel), where the sacrificial rites commenced. On the holiday of Succot, during the *simchat bet hashoeva* ceremony, the Levi'im stood on these 15 steps and sang the 15 chapters of Tehillim, each one beginning with the words *Shir Ha'ma'alot* – “the song of the steps (ascent).”

Pesach falls out on the 15th of Nisan and matches with Succot, exactly six months later on the 15th of Tishrei.

The 15th of Shvat (tu b'shvat), *yom hadin* (day of judgment) for the trees of the world (which will thrive, and which will fall) matches six months later with the 15th of Menachem Av which marks the final day of the year when firewood could be collected for the altar. The 15th of Shvat is a day in the period between the first of Shvat until the 7th of Adar, which was the time when Moshe, our rabbi and leader, voiced his farewell address to the people. And since every rabbi after Moshe Rabbeinu should see himself as continuing Moshe's life's work, it would be appropriate to dedicate the 15th of Av as Rabbis' Day, which fall exactly 6 months after the 15th of Shvat.

Moreover, this day is most appropriate for the rabbis in the various *galu'ot* to declare Rabbis' Day, because they continue in the tradition of Hoshea ben Ela by not utilizing their authority and influence on their congregations to leave the exile and return home.

When was the last time your rabbi stood at the pulpit and banged his fist on the lectern demanding that the congregation "all go up to Zion. Now?"

Peel Away Our World and You Will Find Its Soul

The Torah declares that the land of Eretz Yisrael is *kadosh* -- sanctified. What is the *kedusha* of Eretz Yisrael?

Kedusha is defined as that which is "close" to HaShem, not in spacial terms but in essence. So how close is the Land of Israel to HaShem?

Our parsha provides the answer, hidden away in an "innocent" verse, as are all secrets pertaining to the spiritual world – Devarim 8,8:

"A land of wheat and barley and vine and figs and pomegranate; a land of oil olive and honey dates."

The Talmud (Eruvin 4:a) states that each species mentioned in this verse comes to teach a specific *halacha*.

"Wheat" serves to teach that one who enters a house which was struck with a *nega* (blemish) is immediately rendered *tamei* (impure), but the clothing he wears becomes *tamei* only if he

lingers there for the duration of the measure of time it takes to eat the volume equal to three eggs of bread made of wheat.

“Barley” teaches that a bone from a corpse of a Jew makes one who touches it *tamei* if the bone is at least the size of a grain of barley.

“Wine” teaches that the volume of wine which renders a *nazir* (one who has taken a Nazarite vow) liable is a *revi'it* (86 grams).

“Fig” is the volume of food which makes a person liable for punishment if he carries it from the private domain to the public one, and vice versa, on Shabbat.

“Pomegranate” teaches that a vessel which has a hole in it large enough for a pomegranate to pass through is no longer considered a “vessel” in terms of the laws of *tuma* and *tahara*.

“Zayit” (olive) is the standard size for which eating most prohibited foods becomes a punishable act.

“Honey Date” is the volume of food which renders one punishable for eating on Yom Kippur.

One cannot overestimate the significance of this verse and what is deduced from it.

Let me explain.

Rashi and Tosafot commentaries explain and expound upon the Talmud.

The Talmud explains and expounds the Mishna.

The Mishna explains and expounds the Written Torah.

But unlike the beliefs of most people, the Torah is not the ultimate stop, for it too comes to explain and expound a hidden entity. The written Torah is the instruction manual of how to live in and “use” Eretz Yisrael.

And Eretz Yisrael itself, through its topography and flora and fauna, comes to reveal the hidden secrets of Gan Eden.

Harav Chaim of Volozhin, disciple of the Vilna Gaon, authored a classic work on the relation between body and soul, called "Nefesh Ha'Chaim." Among other things, this sefer tells us that the totality of creation can be likened to a many-layered object, like a head of cabbage or an onion, which can be peeled away layer by layer.

In God's creation, each inner world serves as the *neshama* of the one more external to it. Peel away our world and you will find its soul; peel that one away and you will find its soul, and so it goes until we reach the ultimate *neshama* of all things – HaShem.

The Talmud is the *neshama* or the giver of life for the Rashi and Tosafot commentaries.

The Mishna is the *neshama* of the Talmud. The Torah is the *neshama* of the Mishna. Eretz Yisrael is the *neshama* of the written Torah, and Gan Eden is what gives life and reality to Eretz Yisrael.

We were given the Land of Eretz Yisrael, but we need the Torah to explain how we must live and work the Land. The laws of the Sabbatical year; and in the other years, how to plow, how to plant, how to give the tithes, etc. So it continues with every verse in the Torah: the Land and the Halacha. For the Land is the *neshama* and the Torah as appears in our world is its body, its Rashi and Tosefot.

That is what the great Ramban referred to when he wrote in his commentary to Vayikra 18:25:

One is required to keep the mitzvot even in the exile, such as tefilin and mezuzah, so that the mitzvot will not be forgotten when we return to Eretz Yisrael; because the mitzvot were given essentially for those who reside in Eretz Yisrael.

It is for this reason that our rabbis stated (Sifrei Devarim chapter 80) that to reside in Eretz Yisrael is equal to all the other mitzvot of the Torah.

In the blessing before learning Torah we recite:

Blessed... who has chosen us above all the nations and has given us His Torah

HaShem prepared us for nationhood by promising Eretz Yisrael to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov for the future Jewish people, because the major condition for nationality is a specific land area which defines the nation. And as stated in the *bracha*, only after choosing the Jewish people were we given the Torah.

One who studies or teaches Torah outside the Land is compared to one who reads the instructions for an appliance without having it, or learning Rashi and Tosefot without knowing the Gemara, or reading the commentary of the great Ha'Ari Hakadosh of Tzfat without ever seeing the Zohar.

As I stated above, Eretz Yisrael is the commentary and explanation of the more internal Gan Eden, which is closer to HaShem.

This is what Ibn Ezra meant when he wrote in his commentary to the verse in B'reshiet 33:19, which informs us that Ya'akov Avinu purchased land near the city of Shechem:

The Torah records (the purchase) in order to inform us of the virtue of Eretz Yisrael, that whoever owns a part of it is considered to own a part of the next world.

Were we able to decipher the external topography of the Land, we would have an understanding of the heavenly *Gan Eden*. An example of this is the startling fact that seen from a plane or a good topographic map, the hills and valleys near the city

of Bet El, north of Yerushalayim, form the four letters of HaShem's name, Yud – Hei- Vav – Hei

The Jews who are now protecting Eretz Yisrael by battling the present-day Amalek, are fulfilling all the mitzvot of the Torah. And those who give their lives for the people in the Land ascend to a place of glory in the *neshama* of Eretz Yisrael.

Let us all pray for peace in Eretz Yisrael; for the awakening of our religious leaders in the galut to the centrality of Eretz Yisrael in HaShem's world. Let us pray that these religious leaders should be blessed with at least one percent of the courage of our sons and brothers in Tzahal, and lead their followers home to the land called by King David (Psalms 142:6) when he had to flee Eretz Yisrael:

I cried out to you HaShem my protector to return me to the Land of Life (Eretz Yisrael).

Shabbat Shalom

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