

Balak 5773

BS"D Parshat Balak 5773

Part A:

We recite in the Shemoneh Esray prayer:

יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ ,יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

The King who aids and preserves and protects (the Jewish people).

Blessed are You the Protector of Avraham (and his descendants).

Implicit in this statement is that Hashem “aids and preserves and protects” along the periphery of Jewish history but does not complete those tasks which He has invested upon us. We are in need of His protection from those who would destroy us so that we can complete our historic mission.

To be continued.

Part B:

Our Father in Heaven never ceases to amaze, astonish and surprise us by His “behind-the-scenes” genius as He guards and protects His people in Eretz Yisrael.

Rashi in his commentary to Shemot 1,22 relates that on the day when Moshe was born, astrologers informed Paro that according to the heavenly signs, the redeemer of the Jewish slaves had just been born. They also informed Paro that according to their sightings, this Jewish redeemer would eventually find his death by water. Paro immediately ordered that all the children born on that day, Jew and Egyptian alike, be drowned in the Nile River.

However, the astrologers erred on two counts in their interpretation of the signs. It would not be Moshe who would

die by drowning, but rather the Egyptian army which would die by the waters of Yam Suf (Red Sea crossing). Moreover, if in the-then far future, the nation of Egypt should threaten the Jewish people again, the Egyptians would be punished by the waters of the Nile.

How?

HaShem never forgets. The die was cast by the ancient Egyptian astrologers the demise of Egypt will come because of water.

The lifeline of Egypt runs through the Nile River – water for drinking and agriculture, but more so for the surging waters of the Nile as they cascade down the Russian-built great Aswan Dam that produces the electricity for the nation. The heartbeat of Egypt is coordinated with the whirling sounds of the Dam's giant turbine motors.

God, our Father and Protector and by far the world's greatest playwright, has brought about the situation whereby the Ethiopians are constructing a great dam upstream of the Nile, which will dramatically reduce the quantity of water reaching Egypt.

The Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (sometimes referred to as Hidase Dam) is a gravity dam on the Blue Nile River in Ethiopia, about 40 km (25 mi) east of the border with Sudan. It will be the largest hydroelectric power plant in Africa, as well as the 13th or 14th largest in the world, with a reservoir of 63 billion cubic meters.

On 3 June 2013, while discussing the International Panel of Experts' report with President Mohammad Morsi of Egypt, his political leaders suggested methods to destroy the dam, including support for Ethiopian anti-government rebels.

On 10 June 2013, President Morsi said that "all options are open" because "Egypt's water security can in no way be violated." He went on to clarify that this was "not a call to

war” but that he would not allow Egypt’s water supply to be endangered. At another opportunity, Morsi said, “If there is no Nile, there is no Egypt”, and that they would fight if one drop of water is taken away from them.

In the north, the Syrians are ripping each other apart, and in the south Egypt will be too busy with their own tzarot to threaten the Jewish State. Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and soon Iran will all be so absorbed in their own troubles that they won’t have time or energy to annoy Israel.

A coincidence? Or the Hand of God?

I have frequently quoted the Malbim’s commentary on Yechezkel 32,17 regarding the last great world war. The Malbim explains that Yechezkel saw a future coalition of Moslem and Christian nations against the Jews in Eretz Yisrael. And the prophet singles out Egypt as the first enemy nation to be destroyed, followed by the other enemies of the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael.

Part C:

Indeed HaShem “aids and preserves and protects” His people in Eretz Yisrael, as we have witnessed during the 65 years since the establishment of the State. However, it is not an altruistic act of kindness on the part of the Creator, but a necessary condition in His divine plan if we in Eretz Yisrael are to effectuate and implement four objectives which, I believe, He has placed before us.

1. To restore to world Jewry its self respect and hope for the future which were taken from us in the Shoah – as with the wretched dried bones of Yechezkel’s prophecy, which miraculously sprang to life. This the Medina has succeeded in doing to a remarkable degree.
2. To breathe new life into the study of Torah after the destruction of the Torah centers of Europe. This the Medina has done, as we see in almost every corner of the

land.

3. To prepare the land for the arrival of the Mashiach. Could one imagine that the Mashiach would come to a desolate land and enjoy his first meal in the Holy Land of dates and goat milk? Today, the Medina can boast of skyscrapers and the best and finest material benefits the world can offer, and will soon be the world's new Silicon Valley plus.
4. The fourth objective of the Medina is to empty out the galut from its remaining Jews. Here our success has been great in the Moslem lands and with regard to the Jews of the former Soviet Union. The Jews in the more affluent countries of the West may not awaken in time to prevent individuals from turning into statistics.

Part D:

Bil'am wished upon himself:

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may my final end be like theirs!

Bil'am knows that he will reach an end, but that the Jewish nation will never know an end. The future of the Jewish people is undividedly entwined with the future of the Holy Land. That is why Eretz Yisrael is called "Eretz HaChayim" – the land of the living.

Excerpt from the book *With All Your Might 5770*

Barring incidents of accidental death or premeditated murder, when is the moment in one's life that can be pinpointed as the beginning of the death process?

Some claim that we begin leaving this world at the very moment we arrive here. While others set the time at around 18 years of age, when the body begins to lose more cells than it produces.

Whatever the answer, the exception is Moshe Rabbeinu, regarding whom the Torah writes (Devarim 34:7):
Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not dim nor was his strength weakened.

The Torah testifies to the fact that Moshe was as physically vigorous and mentally astute at the age of 120 as he was as a young man, and showed no sign of aging.

So when did Moshe Rabbeinu's death process begin?

There are several other issues that require clarification:

1- Why were Moshe and Aharon denied the privilege of entering the greater sanctity of Eretz Yisrael and condemned to die in the lesser sanctity of the eastern side of the Jordan River?

2- The episode of Korach and his followers occurred in the second year of the Jews' exodus from Egypt. The very next parasha, Chukat, propels us forward 38 years when the Jewish nation is about to enter Eretz Yisrael. There is a 38-year blackout between parashat Korach and parashat Chukat, when the Nation was encamped at Kadesh Barnea. Why?

3- In parashat Chukat, after the demise of Miriam and the disappearance of the ubiquitous well of water, the people come to Moshe with a request for water. Moshe is so furious that he calls them "Hamorim" – rebellious people. Moshe's reaction is far different than his reaction 38 years earlier, when these people's fathers requested water and Moshe brought their demands before HaShem rather than speaking harshly of them. Why?

4- In parashat Chukat, Hashem commands Moshe to speak to a certain rock. Moshe disobeys and hits the rock, as he did 38 years earlier. Why?

5- HaShem informs Moshe and Aharon that their conduct at the rock will precipitate their death outside the primary area of

sanctity on the western side of the Jordan River.

Hit the rock or speak to it – from the point of view of miracles it's all the same. So why were Moshe and Aharon condemned to die without crossing the Jordan?

6- Thirty eight years earlier, Moshe had been commanded to hit the rock to bring forth water. Why did HaShem change the method now?

I submit:

After the death of the generation that left Egypt, and after 38 years of Torah study under the tutelage of Moshe, HaShem tells Moshe that the Jewish people have changed. The message is no longer a heavy handed, dictatorial leadership as expressed by hitting the rock, but a leadership that explains in Halachic terms how the nation should conduct itself.

But when Moshe heard the ungrateful, angry demands for water, he recalled the same blunt, irreverent demands of their fathers 38 years ago. In Moshe's mind, nothing basic had changed, despite the 38 years of Torah study. The people's rejection of HaShem's intimate relationship, as expressed by their demand to return to Egypt, reminds Moshe of the cries and threats of that day long ago. And in Moshe's mind, this rebellious conduct must be answered in the same way it was answered 38 years ago – by hitting the rock.

HaShem appears to Moshe and informs him that there is little apparent change in the people – but the reason for their stagnation is that in the mind of this second generation there is no motivation to change. They see in front of them the same leadership under which the sinners at the Golden Calf were killed; the leaders who were born in the exile of Egypt and oversaw the demise of 600,000 Jews who had sinned by refusing to enter the land. In the mind of the people nothing really happened to initiate change.

HaShem informs Moshe and Aharon that as long as they continue

to lead the nation, the slavery experience of 210 years would always loom large in the national consciousness, and that this inferiority complex would prevent them from achieving spiritual greatness.

Hence, in order to enable the nation to reach their potential as free men and women, a new leadership would have to be appointed. The demise of Moshe and Aharon was predicated on this reality.

The rudiments of the Torah, as well as the nation's new status as HaShem's chosen people, were understood intellectually during the 38 years of study under Moshe and Aharon. However, the implementation was impeded as long as the slavery experience was still ripe in the nation's consciousness. In the minds of the "newborn" Jewish nation, the staff in the hand of Moshe was a substitute for the punishing rods in the hands of the Egyptian overseers.

HaShem knew that the long and arduous road that lay ahead for the Jewish nation in the coming 3500 years must begin with a healthy and proud Jewish nation liberating the Promised Land under the flag of the Torah. Moshe's staff, in its time, was necessary; but a people now under the dominion of Torah law required a new relationship with its leaders.

One thing is certain: In life, nothing remains the same. The challenges facing Am Yisrael become ever more complex, as our existence in the world of Yishmael and Eisav becomes ever more threatened. New leaders ascend the platform of history to guide Am Yisrael in our difficult uphill journey towards that yet unknown goal that was set by HaShem for His chosen people.

To return to the question of Moshe's Rabbeinu's demise.

We can define the exact moment of the onset of Moshe's departure from this world. When Zimri ben Salu sinned in public, Moshe stood by not knowing what to do. At that moment, Pinchas recalled what he had learned from Moshe himself, that

in these circumstances the sinners must be killed.

When Moshe lost his intimate connection with HaShem just at the moment when the nation needed him most, that was the sign from HaShem that the end was drawing near, and the time for Yehoshua to lead the nation in the liberation of Eretz Yisrael had begun.

The multitude of present day religious leaders who preach their personal divergent truths is tantamount to no leadership at all.

I am skeptical if a “world outlook” (hashkafa) of many of today’s religious leaders – formed and anchored in the thinking of our eastern Europe or North African or Middle Eastern galut experiences – holds the answers to the problems facing religious life in today’s Medinat Yisrael, with the return of Jews from over 100 countries and cultures.

What are the qualities of the “leader” so necessary today? The answer can be gleaned from the words of Rambam in Hilchot Melachim chapter 11:

If a king of the Davidic dynasty, who is erudite in the Torah and performs the mitzvot as David his father – both the written and oral Torahs – and influences the nation to return to the Torah and leads in fighting the wars of God, then he has the status of Mashiach. And if he succeeds in defeating our enemies and rebuilds the Bet Hamikdash and gathers in the remnant of Am Yisrael, then he is certainly the Mashiach.

From here we learn that the much sought-after leader for our time is (1) a talmid chacham, (2) a political figure, (3) a truly religious person, (4) a military man, and (5) a charismatic person.

A talmid chacham is one who has a wide and intensive yeshiva education. A political figure implies a secular education that permits him to walk in the great halls of the world’s

capitals. A military person has military experience on the highest level. And a charismatic personality describes someone who is comfortable with all segments of our society.

If you were assigned the task to find a person who fulfills all the requirements as outlined by the Rambam, where would you look?

Would you start your search in the Ner Yisrael yeshiva in Baltimore? Or would you waste your time searching in the Satmar yeshiva in Williamsburg or in Square Town? Would Teaneck answer your needs or the yeshiva in Lakewood?

Could you find "the man" in Bnei Brak or in Meah Sha'arim? Searching all of the above, I believe would be frustrating experiences.

The first two I would begin with are Harav Avichai Ronsky, former chief rabbi of Tzahal and his successor Harav Rafael Peretz.

HaRav Ronsky was appointed to the position of Chief Rabbi of the Army from his seat as the head of the hesder yeshiva in the settlement of Itamar in the Shomron. Upon concluding his tenure of four years, he has returned to the yeshiva. He reached the rank of colonel while serving as a soldier and commander in the paratroopers, and was raised to the rank of brigadier general when becoming the Chief Rabbi.

The incumbent Chief Rabbi, Harav Rafael Peretz, attained the rank of colonel while serving as an air force pilot. He headed the hesder yeshiva in Atzmona before becoming the army's Chief Rabbi, and is now a brigadier general.

There is another colonel (infantry about whom I prefer not to speak). In any event, he is not in the running for Mashiach because he is a kohen.

Dear Reader;

By now you will have understood where this week's divrei Torah is going.

If it is demonstrations, power plays, monetary shenanigans, political intrigues that interest you, you will find many people with whom to vent.

But I suggest that you associate with the future leaders of our nation – bnei Torah who learn and fulfill the Torah in the most serious manner. Individuals who dedicate their lives, in love, to the rebuilding of our beautiful, beloved Eretz Yisrael and the revival of our people here in accordance with the Torah.

These future leaders implement the principles and details of the Torah in every walk of life – education, industry, agriculture, the military, social interaction and all the other facets of modern life, which bring honor to HaShem – this is what chazal called “Kiddush HaShem.”

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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