

Bamidbar 5771

BS"D Parashat Bamidbar 5771

TWO DAYS IN THE MONTH OF IYAR

Part A: Monday, the 19th of Iyar 5771

It is 2:00 PM and I am sitting in my study, peering out of the window onto the main square in the south-eastern part of the Old City of Yerushalayim, pondering the past, present and future.

The square holds the newly rebuilt Churva bet kneset (synagogue) with its imposing white dome. The square is where Jews congregate when coming to the Old City – from the very elderly to the very young, and unwittingly, the beautiful, uplifting words of the prophet Zecharya (8:3-8) come to mind:

Thus does HaShem say: "I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty, the Holy Mountain."

Thus does HaShem say: "Once again elderly men and women will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age."

The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there."

Thus does HaShem say: "It will seem marvelous to the remnant of this people at that time, and seem marvelous to me,"

declares the LORD Almighty.

Thus does HaShem say: "I will save my people from the countries of the east and the west.

I will bring them back to live in Jerusalem; they will be my people, and I will be their God in truth and righteousness."

On days like today, one can almost feel the closeness of the Mashiach. Because exactly 63 years ago on this day – the 19th of Iyar 1948 – the Old City of Yerushalayim fell to the Jordanian Legion under the command of Glub Pasha, better known in his homeland England as Lieutenant-General Sir John Bagot Glubb.

On this day, sixty three years ago, the two eminent batei kneset (synagogues) which distinguished the skyline of the Old City – the Churva and the Nisan Bak synagogue – were blown up, and in the ensuing days all the homes, yeshivot and Jewish property in general were destroyed.

Of the few defenders of the Old City, most were killed in the fighting with those that survived taken prisoners.

So, I sit here in the comfort and serenity of my study, overlooking HaShem's step-by-step return to Zion, through the laughter of the young boys and girls and sighs of nachat (nachas) from the elderly. The Churva is rebuilt, the Nisan Bak shul will soon be rebuilt, and the beautiful apartments are home to 600 families, with many hundreds of students attending the yeshivot and ulpanot here.

And a childhood memory comes to my mind (as I recorded in my book *With All Your Might 2*):

"The 'Churva' Synagogue is magnificent by any standard. Twice in the past, it was destroyed by Arabs. In 1724 by the locals, then rebuilt in 1816 by Am Yisrael, destroyed again in 1948 by the Jordanian Legion led by British officers.

I have a very personal connection with this Bet Kneset (synagogue).

My father z"l was the rabbi of the Sha'arei Tefila synagogue in Flatbush. The synagogue's main sanctuary was in use on Shabbat and holidays and the bet midrash on the lower floor was used for weekday services. On the eastern wall of the Bet Midrash was a beautiful fresco (oil painting directly on the wall) of the Old City of Yerushalayim.

When I was four years old, my father brought me to the bet midrash and seated me in front of the painting and said, "This is your place".

The painting depicted the Jewish Quarter with all its interesting domes and intriguing alleyways, but the eye-catching subjects were the main synagogues – the Churva and Tiferet Yisrael (Nisan Bak synagogue).

At some point in my young life, I was determined that one day I would live there. In 1948, when I was 10 years old, I learned that the Old City had fallen to the enemy and was destroyed by the enemy. The following morning, I went to pray at my regular place, but I could not imagine that everything I saw in the fresco was gone, taking with it my dream to live there one day.

The years came and went. In 1962 my wife and I came on Aliya (return to Israel). We would frequently go to Mount Zion from where it was possible to get a small glimpse of the old Jewish Quarter. Destruction – not a stone on a stone was left.

The Six Day War broke out on Monday June 5, 1967. Two days later on Wednesday, the Israeli flag flew from atop the Temple Mount and, in the words of General Mota Gur when his troops reached the Mount, "Har Habayit Be'ya'daynu" – The Temple Mount is in our hands.

A short time later, the government established the Company for the Reconstruction of the Jewish Quarter, and the mechanism for the return of Jews to the Quarter began.

My family was merited by HaShem to move into the Quarter in 1976, in the fulfillment of my dream.

There were homes, yeshivot, shuls and shops, but the grand bet kneset "HaChurva" lay in ruin and destruction.

This Tuesday, rosh chodesh Nisan 5770, after two days of ceremonies, the restored bet kneset was opened to the public for prayers. The huge breathtaking dome, the frescos, the glorious marble and stone works – I am certain that this will be the last imposing structure of its kind in the Old City before the building of the Bet Hamikdash.

My wife and I went to the first minyan (prayer quorum) at 5:AM. There was not a empty seat in the building.

At the chazon's (cantor) repetition during the shacharit (morning service) the Kohanim, myself included, ascended the bima (stage) to bless the assembled.

The Torah was taken out from the holy ark and placed on the reader's table.

At that moment, I heard my name called out, "Harav Nachman ben Harav Yechezkel Shraga Hakohen", to be the first person called up to the Torah in 62 years.

As I approached the Torah, I envisioned that little boy sitting in front of the painting of the Churva long, long ago in time and far, far away in a foreign land, now being called as the first kohen to resume the holy service in the Bet Kneset, whose destruction by the Jordanians was to presumably end continuous Jewish presence in the Old City of Yerushalayim."

Yerushalaim is engraved in our souls, in our minds, in the oceans of blood that were shed by its Jewish defenders from the time of King David until the heroic battles of the Six Day War.

The holy city, with its many terms of endearment, is cited over 650 times in the TaNaCh (24 books of the Bible) and many times in our tefilot (prayers), while it is not mentioned even once in the not-holy Koran, and was abandoned many centuries ago by the Christians in favor of the city of Rome and others.

It was the hope of Jews over the last 80 generations to return to the city that housed the Holy Temples, the political capital of the Jewish commonwealths and as stated by our father Ya'akov (parashat vayaitzeh) "sha'ar ha'sha'mayim" – "Gateway to Heaven".

But, we are not alone in the desire to be the sovereigns over the Holy City.

The Christians of Europe, under the patronage of their Popes, embarked on crusades to conquer Jerusalem from the Molems, while not neglecting to slaughter countless numbers of Jews on the way.

Upon arriving in Yerushalayim, the City of Peace, they slaughtered the Jews who were here, and laid down the religious-ideological platform which served as fertile ground for Hitler's murderous orgy of six million Jews.

Islam sought and seeks to replace Yitzchak with Yishmael as the chosen one of HaShem. They too murdered many Jews in their desire to possess the Temple Mount, where Avraham was commanded to offer his son Yitzchak as a sacrifice, in their attempt to distort the Bible and the facts of history.

In our time, after 63 years since the establishment of Medinat Yisrael, the religious leadership of Christianity and Islam are still in a state of shock and outrage at the Jewish people

who not only refuse to die, but are returning to Eretz Yisrael to continue to cling to HaShem's holy Torah.

Christians and Moslems will continue to apply political, economic and military coercion on the Medina in their mutual desire to prove that we are not HaShem's chosen people. But as stated in parashat Shemot, the more the Egyptians dealt cruelly with the Jews the more did we increase; so too with our beloved Medina, the more pressure applied to us, the more we increase in every way.

This process will continue until a breaking point between Christianity and Islam. At that time, the differences between our enemies will come to the fore, and they will mutually destruct.

These are the thoughts that come to my mind as I sit in my study and perceive Hashem's hand at work, as He weaves the threads of history into the magnificent tapestry known as Jewish history.

Part B: Tuesday, the 20th of Iyar 5771

Today, our Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu (ha'Levi) addressed a joint session of both houses of the US Congress.

It was a good speech coming from a man who is undeniably patriotic but whose patriotism is anchored in many waters except the most fundamental one – the Creator of heaven and earth demarcated the borders of the Holy Land and commanded the Jewish people to live in all its far flung areas. As in the words of the great RaMBaN (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman) in his comments on the Sefer HaMitzvot of the RaMBaM (Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon):

"We were commanded to inherit (to possess) the land that was

given by God to our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov, and not to leave it (any portion of it) to any other peoples or even to lay it fallow."

But despite this "oversight" on the part of our PM, it was picked up by the Vice President of the United States who accorded it a very meaningful response. Right at the PM's opening sentence, our PM turned to the Vice President and said nostalgically, "Mr. Vice President. Do you remember when we were the new guys on the block?" and the VP smiled and with his hand made a cross on his chest.

Our PM touched on all the right points, which when taken together add up to the impossible chance for peace between us and the Arab occupiers of our lands, and was politically correct not to bring up the matter of the lands which once belonged to the American Indians and to Mexico but were severed from them by brute force and are now occupied by a country called The United States of America.

Our PM was chosen by HaShem to present our case before the US Congress and the world – and I was not. But had I been so chosen I would have said something to the effect:

When a Jew presents a Halachic problem to a rabbi, the rabbi searches for the answer in our later halachic works, such as the Shulchan Aruch. If there is no reference to the matter in that Halachic literature, he turns to the responsa literature (she'ailot v'Tsuvoth) of earlier rabbis. If the matter is not discussed by the earlier rabbis, or in the Mishna or Gemara (Talmud), the rabbi has no choice but to find some direction in the Torah (Bible) itself.

The great national dilemmas that are facing us today have, to my knowledge, no precedents in the Halachic literature, so we turn to the incidents recorded in the Bible itself, and perhaps find some direction of thought.

This week's Torah parasha, Bamidbar, records the preparations which were made in order to enable Am Yisrael to return to and settle the land of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov – Eretz Yisrael – on tribal lines. It was at this junction in our history, that the Jewish people who came from the far flung Auschwitzes, Treblinkes and Buchenwalds of the then Egypt as an unruly, undisciplined boisterous mob, found their family ties and became the holy tribes of Reuven, Shimon, Levi, etc.

We entered the land under the leadership of Yehoshua Bin Nun, defeated the Canaanites and distributed the land according to the method described in the Torah.

About 200 or so years after entering the land, the King of Amon, demanded the return of lands which were captured by the Jews on the eastern side of the Jordan before crossing the river, or face a bloody war.

Yiftach, who was the military and political leader at the time, rejected every one of the demands and went to war.

The Book of Judges (Shoftim chapter 11) relates:

12 Then Yiftach sent messengers to the Ammonite king with the question: "What do you have against me that you have attacked my country?"

13 The king of the Ammonites answered Yiftach's messengers, "When Israel came up out of Egypt, they took away my land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, all the way to the Jordan. Now give it back peaceably."

14 Yiftach sent back messengers to the Ammonite king,

15 saying: "This is what Yiftach says: Israel did not take the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites."

16 But when they came up out of Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and on to Kadesh.

17 Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, 'Give us permission to go through your country,' but the king of Edom would not listen. They sent also to the king of Moab, and he refused. So Israel stayed at Kadesh.

18 "Next they traveled through the wilderness, skirted the lands of Edom and Moab, passed along the eastern side of the country of Moab, and camped on the other side of the Arnon. They did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was its border.

19 "Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon, and said to him, 'Let us pass through your country to our own place.'

20 Sihon, however, did not trust Israel to pass through his territory. He mustered all his troops and encamped at Jahaz and fought with Israel.

21 "Then the LORD, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and his whole army into Israel's hands, and they defeated them. Israel took over all the land of the Amorites who lived in that country,

22 capturing all of it from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the desert to the Jordan.

23 "Now since the LORD, the God of Israel, has driven the Amorites out before his people Israel, what right have you to take it over?

24 Will you not take what your god Chemosh gives you? Likewise, whatever the LORD our God has given us, we will possess.

25 Are you any better than Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever quarrel with Israel or fight with them?

26 For three hundred years Israel occupied Heshbon, Aroer, the surrounding settlements and all the towns along the Arnon. Why didn't you retake them during that time?

27 I have not wronged you, but you are doing me wrong by waging war against me. Let the LORD, the Judge, decide the dispute this day between the Israelites and the Ammonites."

28 The king of Ammon, however, paid no attention to the message Yiftach sent him.

29 Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Yiftach. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites...

32 Then Jiphthach went over to fight the Ammonites, and the LORD gave them into his hands.

33 He devastated twenty towns from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel Keramim. Thus Israel subdued Ammon.

My speech before Congress would have stressed the following points:

1- There is not, nor was there ever a nation of land called Palestine or Palestinians.

2- The entire area between the Mediterranean and the Jordan and between the Jordan and the Euphrates is Jewish land, which is being occupied at the present time by Arabs.

3- There will not be two states, but only one – the State of Israel, where full citizen rights are given to Jews with limited non citizen privileges given to gentiles who could live here if they declare that the Holy land is the possession of Am Yisrael.

4- There will now begin mass building in every area of Shomrom, Yehuda and the Golan, to meet the demands of millions

of Jews who will soon join us.

5- Judaism is the only officially recognized belief. Missionary work is prohibited with a death sentence imposed on perpetrators. All external signs of other religions i.e., statues, crosses, mosques are banned.

I would not get the standing ovations given to our PM, but it wouldn't matter, because in any event those sounds would have been muffled by the applause of infinite angels in the Shamayim.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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