

Behar 5771

BS"D Parashat Behar 5771

Part A:

At 11 A.M. today, Memorial Day for the 22,867 fallen Israeli soldiers in the wars that were forced upon us, sirens from across the land will begin their eerie, wailing signal for a two-minute suspension of all activity. Wherever they are, drivers will bring their vehicles to a stop, get out and stand on the road in silent communion. The city streets, teeming with the cacophony of Israelis who have returned home from over 100 different lands, will become enveloped in speechless silence as the bustling, hurrying public comes to a halt with heads bowed, deep in thought.

As many others, I too will recite the prayer for the deceased (Ai'l Malay Rachamim) and recall the soldiers whom I knew personally who fell on the altar of Medinat Yisrael.

These two minutes of national silence go beyond the ideal that these young men and women and their sacrifice will never be forgotten. For it is a time of great national unity of our people who do not share like ideas and dreams. Words, sentences, speeches, all act as deterrents to unity. Words fall to the ground, amassing height and bulk that form barriers of misunderstanding and conflict at a time and place that demand unanimity of thought and actions.

Unfortunately, unity is achieved among us only in our silence.

Silence cannot be quoted or misquoted. It is the universal catalyst that binds people together.

The Torah points out that when Aharon's two sons – Nadav and Avihu – died at the consecration ceremony of the Mishkan, Aharon's reaction was absolute silence "Va'yidom Aharon". His

silence turned his personal grief into the grief of all Israel.

Today at 11 AM, as in every year that I can recall – as we stand in silence as “one man and one heart” – there will be some who will not join with us, but will demonstratively continue on their way, seemingly oblivious to their surroundings.

They are invariably either Arabs or members of some Haredi sect or cult. They themselves are totally different. The Arab is our enemy, the Haredi our brother, but their message is similar: “We are not part of you”.

I have no problem with the Arab. His god is not my God; his soul is not my soul. For him I have only one answer – he cannot be here.

I know that in the near future, the total financial collapse of the United States will cause great numbers of Jews to come home to Eretz Yisrael. They will displace the Arabs whom HaShem has positioned in a custodial role until the time when the Jewish population will be sufficiently large to settle all the land (See: Zohar, end of Parashat Va'ai'ra)

But what pains me are the Haredi brothers whose sects and cults propagate teachings that corrupt and pervert HaShem's holy Torah. The members of these cults declare themselves to be the true Jews, while even the great talmid chacham who recites Hallel on Yom Ha'atzma'ut (Independence Day) is not. They do not need the Holy Land of HaShem; they can make do with a little shtiebel in the golus. They mock and ridicule our holy soldiers, who risk their lives so that we will not be blown up by a suicide bomber or killed in a terrorist attack.

They believe that their rabbi is instilled with “da'as Torah.” However, “da'as Torah” is no longer the driving religious force it once was, if it ever was. When the great Vilna Gaon said “no” to Chassidism, while other great rabbis said “yes”

to Chassidism, “da’as Torah” became the way that individual rabbanim evaluated a situation through their personal halachic outlook.

Granted, there are also wonderful Haredim whom I make great efforts to emulate – those such as HaRav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, the rosh yeshiva of Kol Torah and renowned posek who have room in their hearts for HaShem and for all their fellow Jews. A student, who was once beset with problems, requested permission to be away for a week in order to visit the graves of the righteous in the Galil. The great rabbi replied, “Why trouble yourself to go so far? One kilometer away is the military cemetery on Har Herzl, there are hundreds of tzaddikim buried there.”

When one studies Parashat Behar – indeed every Parasha of the Torah – one thing becomes crystal clear. The Torah relates to us as Am Yisrael – the Nation of Israel: men, women, children, converts, wealthy, indigent, freemen, servants, scholars, the ignorant, the righteous and the less-than observant.

The tzibur (collective community) of our nation are the Jews in Eretz Yisrael who are aware that they are living a miracle every day of their lives.

Of the Jews who stand in silence when remembering those who gave their lives in defense of our holy land and holy people, many stand and recall their own close encounters with death while serving in Tzahal. The bullet that missed by a millimeter. The mortar shell that landed in the place where he was a moment ago. The tank that ran over an exploding mine with no damage. And the miracles are endless. What do these people think when they see a Haredi who does not stand, even for a minute, to think of the kedoshim who gave their lives for all of us? It certainly does not contribute to a positive attitude toward the Torah of Israel. A more exact term would be – chillul HaShem.

I would venture to conjecture that if these creators of chillul HaShem would leave for Vienna, Antwerp or Brooklyn's Williamsburg, the quantitative and qualitative gap would be quickly filled by many of today's "secular" Israelis who would then return to the Torah.

Part B: Yom Ha'atzma'ut

HaShem created our physical world based on the two dimensions of time and space, and the circumstances of human life on the two dimensions of decision making and implementation. In the realm of our lives, the more laborious of our two dimensions is arriving at decisions, while implementation is mostly taken up with technical matters.

One can never escape the necessity of decision making from the mundane choices of what to wear and what to eat to the life-defining ones, such as where to learn Torah, whom to marry, where to live and what kind of head covering to don.

A major example is a Jew's decision to leave his birthplace, his native language and culture, and come to the land that is promised to him by the Creator Himself.

The moment of decision is, for most people, overwhelming, but after it has been reached, Hashem "takes your hand" and turns the obstacles into benefits.

Let's go back more than 3000 years to when our fathers and mothers stood at the edge of the Red Sea, or two weeks ago at Pessach when we are supposed to envision a deja-vu experience as if we too stood there.

The situation was one of an irresistible force – the Egyptian army, about to converge on an immovable object – HaShem's promise that the Jewish people will exist forever. The Jewish people had no viable options – to fight, capitulate, pray?

HaShem took the Jewish nation to the edge of the abyss, with

one foot over the top and quickly losing their balance. And then Moshe commanded in the name of HaShem that the nation leap into the churning waters of the Sea. The people did the impossible – they obeyed and leaped into the very uninviting waters. The waters divided and the rest is miraculous factual history.

Now let's return to 63 years ago, to May 14, 1948 at the Tel Aviv Museum. Gathered there were members of the Jewish Agency leadership – the representatives of the Jewish yishuv (public) – to cast their vote for or against the establishment of the State of Israel.

It was a formidable task, with little reason to envy the people who had to make these providential decisions.

The United States and our European “friends” strongly recommended that we do not declare a state, and gave credence to their recommendation by imposing an arms embargo on the yishuv.

In addition, the armies of seven Arab countries were poised at the gates of the Holy Land ready to invade if we should declare a state. The men who were gathered at the historic meeting had to decide if they were to plunge the 650,000 Jews who comprised the yishuv into a war where – according to any military logic – we had no chance of surviving. And this was only three years after the Holocaust when the Jewish nation had lost a third of its sons and daughters.

This situation was no less intense and portentous than when the Jewish people stood before the Red Sea.

Hashem blessed those assembled with the spirit of valor and courage, and just as their fathers had done 3000 years previously, they took the leap of faith and declared, against all reason, they chose to establish a Jewish homeland, to be called Medinat Yisrael. HaShem blessed their courage when they defeated the seven Arab armies, greatly increasing the

physical boundaries of the Medina.

This same courageous choice was repeated when we made a preemptive air strike in the Six Day War, and were rewarded with the gift of Yerushalayim.

It was repeated again when we sent our soldiers 5000 kilometers to rescue the Jews in Entebbe, and yet again when we sent ten planes to destroy the Iraqi nuclear reactor.

And it will be repeated in the future when the State of Israel is called on again to make the leap of faith in the name of the God of Israel.

This is what Medinat Yisrael is all about – the sanctification of the name of the God of Israel.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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