

Be'shalach and Tu Be'shvat 5773

BS"D Parashat Be'shalach and Tu Be'shvat 5773

Part A:

In our parasha, Am Yisrael marches out of Egypt as free men. After 210 years of galut, which included the tragic slavery experience, our ancestors breathed the air of emancipation, as they made their way to the greatest future of any nation.

Free men? Emancipated? Indeed!?

Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers chapter 6) quotes the verse (Shemot 32,16)

The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

and explains the dual reading of the word *Charut*. It can be read "charut" meaning engraved (on the tablets) or "chairut" meaning freedom, and explains:

*Do not read the word to mean only 'engraved' because it can be understood to mean 'freedom' – for no man is **free but he who indulges in the study of Torah***

The Jews left Egypt prior to receiving the Torah and as such were not yet free men according to the teachings of Pirkei Avot. So what was their halachic judicial status in the 49 days between the exodus and Sinai, slaves or free men?

I suggest:

One who is physically shackled but is still in control of his thoughts, has lost his freedom; however, one who is physically

free but has been brainwashed to the extent that his thought processes are controlled, distorted and perverted has lost his humanity.

Our parasha relates that when the Jews saw the Egyptians in pursuit of them, the newly “freed” people demanded of Moshe to return to Egypt, even if it meant return to slavery. When the Jews left Egypt they were physically free, but their humanity had not yet been restored; their slave mentality still controlled them.

It took the momentous experience of receiving the Torah at Sinai to fully emancipate the people. But even then, there were still individuals who remained slaves in spirit, as demonstrated by their repeated demands to return to Egypt whenever faced with a challenging situation.

The exodus from Egypt restored our physical freedom; the Torah restored our humanity.

To be continued:

Part B:

The 70 individuals who entered Egypt as the Jewish family, exited Egypt after 210 years of physical and mental subjugation, millions strong, as the Jewish nation.

Why did the Jewish nation have to go through the “slave” experience?

The answer lies in the last parasha of the Book of Beraishiet – Va’ye’chi.

Yaakov, in his final words to his twelve sons, deals very harshly with Shimon and Levi. Since the particular qualities of every one of Yaakov’s sons were transmitted genetically to the future descendants of a particular tribe, our grandfather Yaakov is in effect criticizing the fundamental nature of the Kohanic and Levitic families. This is a matter which cannot be

taken lightly.

There are glaring difficulties in Ya'akov's farewell to his children:

1) The most caustic words were uttered to Shimon and Levi. Ya'akov castigates them for their anger which brought about the death of one man; as it says, "Ki Be'apam har'gu iesh" – in their anger they killed a man. Rashi, based on the midrash, points out that Shimon and Levi killed not only one man, they decimated the entire city of Sh'chem. So why did Ya'akov say they killed "a man"? Rashi explains that in Ya'akov's mind the entire population of Sh'chem was valued as no more than "one man". If Yaakov had such low esteem of the people of Sh'chem, why was he so angry at Shimon and Levi?

2) The most complimentary blessing was given to Yosef. However, Yosef had an illustrious descendant, Yehoshua Bin Nun, who killed not one man, not one city, but all the Canaanites in the land who opposed the fulfillment of God's promise that the Holy Land belongs solely to Am Yisrael. HaShem commanded Yehoshua, "Lo te'chaye kol neshama" (do not let any of the enemy live). Yaakov does not relate to what this descendant of Yosef would do, so why does he castigate Shimon and Levi for killing one Sh'chemite?

3) When one is diagnosed to be suffering from a contagious disease, the first medical act is to isolate the carrier. Yaakov exposes the character faults of zealousness and anger of Shimon and Levi, so why does he say to them (chapter 49,7): "A'chal'kem be'Yaakov ve'a'fee'tzem be'Yisrael" – "I shall divide them among the children of Yaakov, and disperse them among the children of Israel".

Rashi quotes the Gemara which says that the major function of the tribe of Shimon was to teach the children of Yisrael, and the tribe of Levi was delegated to serve in the Holy Temple. Now if their faults were so notorious, why did Yaakov make

them the molders of young minds, and why did he elevate the tribe of Levi to such an exalted position?

I believe, when Dina was assaulted in Sh'chem, nine brothers barely reacted, whereas Shimon and Levi went through the town killing all its people. Yaakov said that in light of the other brothers' passivity the punishment of Sh'chem appears as the work of a "lunatic" rightist fringe group which does not represent the mainstream ideology of Judaism, and invites dangerous reactions from the world at large. Shimon and Levi were correct in their belief that Judaism states that any hand raised against a Jew will be severed, however the brothers' passivity created a perception that Shimon and Levi did not represent Torah thought. Yaakov blessed Shimon and Levi that they should disseminate the ideal among the entire nation that malice done to any Jew will not go unpunished. When this becomes the norm of the nation, the "world" will perceive this conduct as part of the Jewish national character and will respect it. To this end Shimon becomes the teachers of the future generations and Levi its spiritual leaders.

Yaakov is not angered at Yehoshua Bin Nun, the descendant of Yosef. Quite the opposite, because in Yehoshua's time the lessons of Jewish pride had already taken hold in the hearts of the nation; that anyone who stood in the way of our Jewish historical destiny would be crushed under the steamroller of the Jewish national destiny.

The "slavery" experience in Egypt was necessary to inculcate the lessons of Shimon and Levi. That we must never again be "guests" in the lands of others, but free people in Eretz Yisrael where we would have the power and national will to destroy any adversary who would rise up against us.

Unfortunately the lessons of Shimon and Levi, with the agreement of Yaakov, were lost in the two thousand year "slavery" in galut, except for the few who cherish the concept of Jewish pride, and devote their lives to sanctifying

Hashem's name in the world.

Today, Tuesday the 11th of Shvat (January 22, 2013) is election day in the Medina. We are presented with a supermarket of parties and candidates, which makes it difficult to decide for whom to vote due to the subtle differences between many of them.

In contrast to the blurred and foggy alternatives of Tuesday, clearer choices were placed before the Israeli public on Sunday, regarding two Jews who represent extremely divergent world outlooks.

On Sunday, Ron Nachman, the illustrious mayor of Ariel, the capital of the Shomron, was put to rest on a hillside overlooking the city of over 20,000 residents he so much loved. Ron Nachman dedicated his life to building a city in Eretz Yisrael, while having to overcome Arab terror, United States opposition, and Israeli bureaucracy.

On that same day, the Medina was host to a very problematic visitor – the Satmar Rebbe, R. Zalman Leib Teitlebaum, who after a less than brotherly confrontation divided the Satmar dynasty between him and his brother R. Aharon Teitlebaum, with R. Zalman Leib taking control over the Williamsburg wing and R. Aharon acquiring the Kiryat Yoel area in upstate New York. This is his first visit to Medinat Yisrael since his appointment as Rebbe in Williamsburg.

According to informed sources, the Rebbe arrived in Israel ostensibly on the occasion of his granddaughter's wedding which will take place on Wednesday.

After arriving on a Turkish Airliner (El Al? never!) and landing at the international airport named for our first Prime Minister David Ben Gurion (no choice), the Rebbe participated in an anti-Israel, anti-voting rally in Shabbat Square near the hareidi Mea Shearim neighborhood.

While looking at the photos of the many thousands (some say tens of thousands) of “devotees”, I marveled at the patience of the Israeli justice system that tolerates such a large segment of people who wish the destruction of the State; and all in the name of the Jewish God. In any rational country, a group that wishes the destruction of the State would be branded a fifth column, and punished as prescribed by law.

So, here are your choices: Ron Nachman who lies caressed by the warm, holy earth of Eretz Yisrael he so much loved and sacrificed for, vs. the Satmar Rebbe who cringes at the very mention of Medinat Yisrael.

However, it is apparent to me and to many others, including the legal authorities that the throng in Shabbat Square is not ideologically motivated. They were once free men, but now they are restored to the status of slaves. Not slaves to Paro, but slaves to those who have numbed their minds and free will through the tens of millions of dollars allocated to them by the Satmar empire to oppose the Medina in a manner which would bring satisfaction to the Arab League. Their ability to think independently has been commandeered like that of a slave whose freedom to think and decide has been taken from him. And the “slavery” experience in Egypt so necessary to inculcate the lessons of Shimon and Levi that we must be free people in Eretz Yisrael where we would rebuild our religious-national home and have the power and national will to destroy any adversary, has been taken from them.

Fortunately, the process is reversible. Stop the flow of Satmar money and these people will eventually return to normalcy and see the blessings HaShem provides us at every moment in this holy Medina.

Part C:

For Tu Bi'Shvat

The phrase “For man is like a tree in the field” (Devarim

20,19) has been the subject of most commentators on the Torah. Why is man likened to a tree in the field?

The Gaon of Vilna is quoted in the book Be'sod ha'Kaitz ha'meguleh (The Secrets of the Visible Redemption) as saying, "May HaShem merit me to plant with my own hands fruit trees around Yerushalayim, to fulfill the verse (Vayikra 19,23) "When you come to the Land, you shall plant fruit trees".

This verse, which commands us to plant fruit trees in Eretz Yisrael, assumes a greater degree of importance in view of the Midrash (Vayikra chapter 25):

At the beginning of the world's creation, HaShem planted fruit trees, as is stated (Beraishiet 2,8) 'And HaShem planted a garden in Eden'. Therefore you (the Children of Israel) when you enter the land indulge first in the planting of fruit trees".

Why is the planting of fruit trees so important in the life of the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael?

I submit:

The Jewish nation had just completed 40 years of wandering in the desert. At that time, the desert was owner-less property, and the Jews' relationship to the ground they stood on was impersonal. Added to this was the temporary stay at every station in the desert, when at any moment HaShem's clouds of glory could begin to move, signaling the nation to uproot their belongings and move on to another unknown station. In addition, their feelings of transiency were intensified by the fact that the very food which sustained them every day for 40 years, the Manna, was provided on a day by day basis, and there was no guarantee that the nation would have food beyond one day.

HaShem's intention was to convey to the Jewish nation the

impermanence, interim, momentary and unstable essence of the galut, as opposed to the enduring, everlasting, immutable, indestructible, invariable, perpetual relationship between Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael.

The immutable connection between nation and land is created through the planting of fruit trees, like the olive tree, which can last for hundreds of years, binding the generation of the planter with the generations of the future.

In addition, the proliferation of fruit trees is a critical and determining sign of the redemption of Am Yisrael, as stated in Tractate Sanhedrin 98a based on the prophet Yechezkel (36,8):

But you, mountains of Israel, will produce branches and fruit for my people Israel, for they will soon come home. And Rabbi Abba says, "There is no more obvious sign (of the redemption) than this.

In the musaf prayer of Shabbat and holidays we ask of HaShem

*May You bring us up in joy to our land and **implant us** in our borders*

We beseech HaShem to bring us up to Eretz Yisrael. But that is not sufficient, because one can be here but not be part of the life of the people, like those who never become citizens, always living on the periphery of society. Therefore we add "and implant us in our borders". Make us like the trees of the land whose roots are implanted deep, for future generations. Grant us in our lifetime to see children, grandchildren and more, born in this land, tanned by its sun, speaking its holy language, all well versed in the holy Torah and ready and able to defend the Holy Land against any adversary.

Indeed, may HaShem make us like the trees in the field, whose roots are in the earth but whose branches reach up to the

heavens.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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