

Bo 5776

BS"D Parashat Bo 5776

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We are Descendants of the 20%

HaShem is the creator of time and the master of timing, notwithstanding our inability to appreciate His elusive subtleties.

Tradition tells us that the ten plagues occurred over a period of one year, during which time the servitude ceased, and the Jews were able to sit back to enjoy in spectator fashion the sweet taste of revenge.

However, during this time there raged a fiery, no-holds-barred national debate on the essential issue of the day. It divided families, turned friends into enemies, and bisected tribal and gender lines. It was approached from every available logical angle: religious, national, philosophical, familial, social, etc. The davening in shuls was interspersed with exclamations of anger from various corners of the synagogues, and even the usual chatter during krias ha'Torah regarding the Aswan security exchange was set aside in the face of this issue.

It was an unprecedented life-and-death issue that transcended one's ability to analyze potential variants or project the influence of the decisions on present and future generations. It was a matter which penetrated deep into each person and required a soul-searching probe of one's conscience.

Moshe Rabbeinu had laid out HaShem's immediate and future plans for the Jewish people. They would leave Egypt, receive the Torah at Mount Chorev, and then physically expel or even kill millions of Canaanites living in Eretz Yisrael in order

to inherit the land, as promised to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov.

The sheer immensity of the plan made eighty percent of the Jewish people recoil in disbelief. How could they, a people born in slavery, broken in body and spirit, go out into the foreboding desert, and then make war upon seven Cannanaite nations strategically divided into 31 powerful city states? Where would they get food and water in the desert? Who would heal their wounds and train them militarily? Does not the very idea that they would not enter the Holy Land as pious pilgrims, but as imperialistic conquerors run counter to the traditions they received from their parents of a compassionate and loving God?

Religious logic, they claimed, dictates that HaShem would give them the Torah and they would live in peace and tranquility here in Egypt, as benevolent rulers over their former masters. And after several generations of experiencing freedom, they could come to Eretz Yisrael through some sort of political understanding or through historical evolution resulting in the millions of goyim living in Eretz Yisrael disappearing.

Most concluded that it was not possible that what Moshe was saying originated from the compassionate, loving God of our ancestors.

For them, emancipation from slavery meant that they could now sit in the front of the Alexandria express bus. They could eat in restaurants without the ubiquitous "No Hebs or dogs allowed" sign. The Egyptians would no longer call them "boy," but now they would be called "sir." They could walk with heads held high, because Moshe – one of their own – was the most popular figure in public life. These were the upper limits of their dreams – the bus, the restaurant, the respect.

This was what emancipation was all about; and after so many tearful years, it was finally achieved. "Now we can live

again", they thought.

Then there were the other 20% who had no means of negating the claims of the overwhelming 80% majority in a logical way, because logic was totally on the side of the "refuseniks". Nevertheless, these 20% tenaciously accepted that Moshe's message was directed to him by HaShem.

HaShem had far greater ambitions for the Jewish nation than just sitting behind the driver in the bus or being served by an Egyptian who would call them "sir". The Jewish people were destined to fulfill a spiritual mission in the world. They were to be HaShem's "shock troops" in the long battle of humanity which was to continue for the next five thousand years.

The test of who would be qualified to spearhead HaShem's agenda for humanity was their willingness to leave the comforts of Egypt to face the harsh life of the desert and the pending war against the giants of Canaan.

The day of reckoning was not far off. During the plague of darkness, the 80% of "rational humanitarian" Jews perished, and the remaining 20% left Egypt to take up HaShem's mission. We are the descendants of those 20%.

The problem is that we Jews are still struggling among ourselves. We have Jews who, like their fellow Afro-American citizens, are satisfied with being accepted at the local golf course and are no longer the object of whispers when they enter the board room. They feel elated when they turn to their local ADL (Anti-Defamation League) chapter, after filing a protest with the sheriff who orders the city workers to erase the death threats from their shul's entrance.

There were other Jews who set their eyes on far greater horizons. They were the few who returned to Eretz Yisrael. In the 18th century, they were students of the Vilna Gaon, and in the 19th century they were Chassidic Jews, including my great

grandparents who arrived in Tzfat in 1863. Then came the Chalutzim who drained the swamps and died of malaria, and fought the Arabs with little more than their bare hands. They were and still are the spirit of Am Yisrael throughout the generations who accepted the special destiny of being HaShem's "shock troops".

Thank God for this thin veneer of holy people who justify God's patience with all the rest.

They have lost and we have won

In Shemot chapter 10, Moshe warns Paro of the imminent plague of locusts and then leaves the palace. At this point, Paro's advisors say to him (verse 7):

וְעַד מָתַי יִהְיֶה אִישׁ אֶת־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם לְפִתְיוֹן לְפָרֹחַ?
:וְעַד מָתַי יִהְיֶה אִישׁ אֶת־אֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם לְפִתְיוֹן לְפָרֹחַ?

“Until when will this man be a trap to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the Lord their God. Do you not yet realize that Egypt is lost?”

The Torah continues to relate that Paro heeded the counsel of his advisers and recalled Moshe and Aharon to continue their dialogue. Paro tells Moshe and Aharon that he consents to let the Jews leave the borders of Egypt in order to pray, and he asks to know who will be going. When Moshe answers that all will leave – from the very young to the very old – Paro “loses it” and in extreme anger expels Moshe and Aharon from the palace.

This gives rise to two questions:

1- Why did Paro not order that Moshe and Aharon be killed? He certainly had the power to do so!

2- From this point on, Paro acts irrationally. He agrees with his advisors that "Egypt is lost". So why does Paro end up relentlessly leading his army into the precarious, life-threatening path between the two towering walls of water of the Yam Suf, before they come crashing down upon them?

Paro's conduct could serve as the subject of a year's course in abnormal psychology; because after admitting that all is lost, he nevertheless acts in a way that is totally detached from reality.

But, in fact, Paro's conduct is quite understandable, as we will see shortly.

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 91a) relates that Alexander the Great of Macedonia established an international tribunal to adjudicate claims of nations against nations.

Three claimants came forth with petitions against the Jewish nation. The descendants of Canaan demanded the return of Eretz Yisrael which was taken from them by Yehoshua bin Nun; the Egyptians demanded the return of the wealth, which the Jews took with them during the exodus; and the descendants of Yishmael demanded half of Eretz Yisrael, since Yishmael too was a son of Avraham.

In all the cases, Gevi'a ben Pesisa, our advocate, succeeded in rebuffing all claims against the Jewish nation.

Since the time of Alexander, there is no record of a court trying the Jews as a nation; although many Jews, as individuals or communities, were brought by the Catholic Church before their "courts", either as an annoying formality or a day's entertainment before burning the defenseless, accused Jews.

That is to say, until our time. Today, we are witnessing attempts by various "defenders" of human rights to accuse the State of Israel, the internationally recognized spokesman of

the Jewish people, of crimes against humanity.

So far, we have the ICC – the International Criminal Court – in The Hague, and a court in Spain (just out of the garbage bin of history), which intends to try the heads of Tzahal for killing an arch terrorist in 2002.

What is driving these people to stand in judgment of the Jewish people? Certainly, it stems from the primitive, crass anti-Semitism that Christians get from the milk of their mothers; but it is more than that. It reaches deep into their souls and finds its explanation in Paro's conduct, as revealed in Bo and Beshalach.

The midrash states (Shemot 21)

וַיִּצְחָק יִצְחָק שְׁנֵי מַתָּנִים לְבָנָיו , וְלַבְּנוֹתָיו שְׁנֵי מַתָּנִים ... וְלַבְּנוֹתָיו שְׁנֵי מַתָּנִים , וְלַבְּנוֹתָיו שְׁנֵי מַתָּנִים (וְלַבְּנוֹתָיו) וְלַבְּנוֹתָיו שְׁנֵי מַתָּנִים , וְלַבְּנוֹתָיו שְׁנֵי מַתָּנִים ... וְלַבְּנוֹתָיו שְׁנֵי מַתָּנִים , וְלַבְּנוֹתָיו שְׁנֵי מַתָּנִים (וְלַבְּנוֹתָיו) וְלַבְּנוֹתָיו שְׁנֵי מַתָּנִים (וְלַבְּנוֹתָיו) וְלַבְּנוֹתָיו שְׁנֵי מַתָּנִים

Yitzchak bequeathed two gifts (ways of life) to his sons. To Ya'akov he gave the gift of "speech" (to pray and study Torah) ... and to Eisav he gave the sword... At the end of days, HaShem will give to each his due reward. Eisav will be punished with HaShem's heavenly sword and Ya'akov will receive the joys of singing and happiness.

Historically, the weapon of Eisav against the Jewish people has been the sword. Whenever a priest or nun passes me in Yerushalayim, and there are unfortunately many of them, I see in my mind's eye red oceans of our people's blood which these co-religionists "of God" have spilled over the last 2000 years of our exile.

The sword has indeed been very busy, but Ya'akov's voice has not been silent. For despite it all, we have continued to pray

and learn Torah in the most dreadful circumstances, until the time 60 years ago when HaShem returned His children to the Holy Land.

And suddenly we find the traditional roles of Ya'akov and Eisav reversed. We have taken up the sword through the holy soldiers of Tzahal, and the goyim have taken over our "speech" through their courts of "justice".

What has happened?

Enter Paro – for he will cast light upon our current events.

Paro's conduct is understandable. He knew intellectually that his advisors were correct in their assessment that Moshe and Aharon had won and that he, Paro, had lost.

During the year of the ten plagues, Paro and Moshe carried on a religious disputation, where Moshe comes in the name of HaShem and Paro denies the One, invisible God of the Jewish people and maintains that his deity is the absolute truth.

Paro cannot kill Moshe, for to do so would be to admit his (Paro's) philosophical and religious inferiority. Rather, Paro has to keep Moshe alive until he submits to the truth of Paro and his priests.

But when the advisors spell it out very plainly to Paro that all is lost – that Moshe has won and the Egyptian way of life is a lie – Paro knows intellectually that what they are saying is true but he refuses to accept it.

He continues to forge ahead, irrationally, despite the knowledge that all Egypt has lost, and he leads his people into the Red Sea.

This is the reality that we are facing today in the world.

The Christians and Moslems know deep down that with the establishment of the State of Israel they have lost.

For 2000 years, they tried in every devious and cruel way to destroy the Jewish nation. Some methods were subtle – as in their attempts to convert the Jews through debate and dialogue – and others were starkly frank as when Jews were burned at the stake or taken to concentration camps.

They hurt us and scarred us, but we have survived. The goyim know that they have lost, but they, like Paro, are incapable of accepting it. By reverting to the courtroom, they are in fact admitting that they cannot beat the Jews with the sword of Eisav. However, like Paro, they cannot internalize this truth.

The descendants of Eisav, through the Catholic Church, Nazi Germany and the Communist-atheistic Soviet Union, tried unsuccessfully to eradicate the Jewish nation. Despite the wars Islam has fought and continues to fight against us, they know deep down that their sword is dulled. However, one can face the reality that the Jewish nation has returned home, under the wing of God; that they have lost and we have won.

What will happen when Eisav and Yishmael realize that the sword is dulled and their adopted voice will not bring them salvation? Here comes the scene of Gog, King of Magog, which our prophets predicted.

Instead of confronting Islam, the western Christian world will join with Islam in a final desperate attempt to destroy the Jewish nation. At this point, HaShem will intercede and we will witness the greatest of miracles, as predicted by our prophets.

This will happen; and when it does, the only place to be is in Eretz Yisrael!

Shabbat Shalom,

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