

Bo 5781

BS"D Parashat Bo 5781

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

A Tale of Two Ambassadors

Several years and several ambassadors ago, I was invited by the Orthodox Union in Israel to speak at a function together with the then US ambassador, whose identity is now irrelevant except for the fact that he is an Orthodox Jew. The topic was "Land for Peace".

There were about three hundred people attending the function which took place at the present-day Leonardo Hotel on King George Street in the heart of Yerushalayim.

In his remarks, the US ambassador reiterated the US policy of Israel withdrawing from Shomron and Yehuda in return for peace; meaning withdrawing from the heartland of Eretz Yisrael in return for a promise of peace. Not worth the **piece** of paper it would be written on. (It reminds me of a political cartoon depicting an Indian chief in full regalia saying, "Now let me tell you something about land for piece"). I was not terribly moved by the ambassador's seemingly erudite but suicidally cloaked suggestions, because he was just saying what he was paid to. I recall how he finished his speech.

He said he wanted to read from the **writings of the fathers**, and then proceeded to quote from Presidents Washington, Jefferson and other great Americans.

With this ingenious closing the ambassador had put me into a feisty mood and I was preparing for the "suerte de muleta" (the final passes that the toreador makes with a red cape to finish off the bull).

After greeting the ambassador and the audience, I continued by pointing out the many historic, religious and security pitfalls and deficiencies in the US position. Here are my closing remarks:

“Distinguished Ambassador, I envy you. You know very clearly who you represent; you are the United States Ambassador to the State of Israel.

My problem is that I too, as a Kohen, am an ambassador. However, I don't know who I represent exactly. In tractate Yoma of the Gemara it states clearly that Kohanim are ambassadors (shlichim), but it was not clear to the Talmudic scholars if we are HaShem's ambassadors to Am Yisrael or Am Yisrael's ambassadors to HaShem. The Gemara goes on to present a practical halachic situation that depicts the difference between the two.”

Then I said: “Honorable Ambassador, I too would like to end my speech by quoting from the writings of our fathers,” and proceeded to read from Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) from the siddur which is always with me. I held up the siddur for all to see and began reading. At the end I said, “Honorable Ambassador – Let's not be confused – **these** are the **writings of OUR fathers**”.

Present-Day

Over the last four years, we have had the unique privilege of having the honorable Mr. David Friedman as the US Ambassador to our country.

President Donald J. Trump performed many impressive and courageous acts in his four years as President of the United States in the areas of the economy, national security, budget, illegal immigration and much more; but his appointment of Mr. Friedman to serve as the US Ambassador to the State of Israel was a divinely inspired stroke of genius.

President Trump, Ambassador Friedman and others advanced our sovereignty in real terms over the land more than any previous administration and will in all probability be the last truly pro-Zionist administration in US history.

Ambassador Friedman was involved in major activities, such as transferring the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to our nation's capital, Yerushalayim, recognizing our sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and the legality of our settlements in Shomron and Yehuda, and closing the US Consulate in East Yerushalayim – the primary purpose of which had originally been to foster Arab interests at the expense of the Jewish State.

During his tenure as ambassador, he brought the military wing of the two nations closer than ever before, especially in the areas of shared intelligence where Israel is a major player in the shadowy world of national security, and he succeeded in procuring workable agreements of a growing number of Arab States toward normalization with the Jewish State.

Last week the Knesset paid tribute to the ambassador's contributions to Israel. Mr. Friedman, in a very moving speech, pointed out that as the number of Jews in the world decreases due to assimilation and low birthrate, the population of Israel has increased from six hundred thousand Jews in 1948 to over seven million today. He proudly acknowledged that he is a Torah observant Jew and that his love for Eretz Yisrael is part of his worldview. He ended his remarks by stating that the future of the Jewish people is only here in Medinat Yisrael.

Dear Ambassador Friedman, we are both Kohanim. It is my personal wish that when the Bet HaMikdash is rebuilt on the Temple Mount, I merit to serve together with you in the performance of our common mission as ambassadors of HaShem to Am Yisrael and as Am Yisrael's ambassadors to HaShem.

As down payment for your services to our people, HaShem has

presented you with a special gift.

The previous ambassador who read from the writings of the “founding fathers of America” is one of many ambassadors who served in the US State Department. Does anyone remember their names? However, the name of David Friedman will always be remembered when enlightened people discuss the modern history of the holy city of Yerushalayim.

Will you be part of the 80% or the 20%?

HaShem is the creator of time and the master of timing; notwithstanding our inability to always appreciate His elusive subtleties. Chazal tell us that the ten plagues occurred over a period of one year, during which time the servitude ceased, and the Jewish people were able to sit back as spectators to enjoy the sweet taste and smell 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, and social. The davening in shuls was interspersed with exclamations of anger from all sides, even the usual chatter during the 'Torah reading regarding the Aswan security exchange was set aside in the face of this issue.

It was an unprecedented life-and-death issue that transcended everyone's ability to analyze potential variants or project the influence of the decisions on present and future generations. It required a soul-searching and deeply penetrating probe of every person's conscience.

Moshe Rabbeinu, HaShem's personal ambassador to His nation Yisrael, laid out HaShem's immediate and future plans for His

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 immensity of the plan caused 80% of the Jews to recoil in disbelief. How could they, a people born in slavery and broken in body and spirit, go out into the foreboding desert, and then make war on seven Canaanite nations who were 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? Did the idea that they would not enter the Holy Land as pious pilgrims, but as imperialistic conquerors run counter to the God-given traditions of compassion they had received from their parents?

The soon-to-be emancipated Jews claimed that according to religious logic, HaShem would give them the Torah and they would continue living in Egypt in peace and tranquility as benevolent rulers over their former masters. It would follow logic that, after several generations of experiencing freedom, they could come to Eretz Yisrael through some sort of political understanding or through historical evolution that would result in the disappearance of the millions of goyim inhabiting Eretz Yisrael.

Most of the Jews concluded that it was not possible that Moshe's declarations originated from the compassionate and 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 is what emancipation is 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 logical way to refute the claims of the majority, but nevertheless held on tenaciously to the belief that Moshe's message was directed to him by HaShem. That 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 person qualified to spearhead HaShem's agenda for humanity would have to be someone willing to leave the comforts of Egypt, face the harsh life of the desert and to confront 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%.

It is an unfortunate fact that we Jews are still fighting among ourselves along similar lines. There are Jews who are satisfied with being accepted at the local golf course and are no longer the object of whispers when they enter the boardroom. They feel elated when they turn to their local ADL (Anti-Defamation League) chapter, to file a protest with the sheriff who then orders the city workers to erase the death threat graffiti painted on their shul's entrance.

Fortunately, there were other Jews who set their sights on far greater horizons. Firstly, the Jews who never left the land from the time of the Roman conquest. Then there were the few who returned to Eretz Yisrael. In the 18th century they were

students of the Vilna Gaon. In the 19th century they were Chassidic Jews, including my great grandparents who arrived in Tzfat in 1873. Then came the chalutzim (pioneers) 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".

"There is nothing new under the sun", said Shlomo Hamelech in Kohelet. The same deviations of thought that existed in Egypt more than 3000 years ago are still alive and kicking today. Happy is the one who sees beyond the myopic vision of feeble contentment; and woe to those who cannot, or will not, rise to the status of the Creator's Chosen People.

B careful B healthy B here

JLMM Jewish Lives Matter More



Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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