

BS"D Bechukotai Parashat 5784

Free Will

A MESSAGE TO YOUNG JEWISH MEN PRESENTLY IN GALUT

This week's parasha begins with the gift and challenge of free-will that distinguishes us from all other species in HaShem's creation – mineral, flora, fauna and angels – the freedom to choose.

The parasha places before the Jewish people two alternatives – one desirable, the other undesirable, non-halachic but with the freedom to commit spiritual suicide. One holds the key to a life of kedusha (spirituality) here and in the next world, the other to a future of regret and misfortune.

It would appear that the choice is obvious; for who would relinquish a future of bliss for a future of regret? However, HaShem creates in each one of us a tailor-made element to balance out the choices – the desire or need for instant gratification vs. an un-mapped, guarded future.

In the race between decision making among alternatives followed by its implementation, decisions are almost always the more difficult and frustrating.

Case in point: the decision to leave the land of your birth to come on aliya and then implementing it. Implementation can take a year or so, but often the decision and mental fluctuations can take decades. But both decisions – to stay in your familiar galut surroundings or to return to HaShem's promised land have long lasting consequences.

It is told of the renowned Chofetz Chaim (Harav Yisrael Meir

HaKohen tztl), when a student came for a bracha (blessing) for success before leaving for New York to assume the position of a synagogue rabbi, the Chofetz Chaim listened attentively to the young man's enthusiastic plans for his future kehilla, and then asked: "Are you a kohen?"

The young man replied in the negative, to which the venerable Rav asked, "why not?"

And the young man was perplexed by the question.

Then the Rav pointed a finger at himself and said proudly: "I am a kohen!"

Then he asked the young man if he was a Levi.

The student replied in the negative, to which the venerable Rav again asked, "why not?"

And the student was again perplexed.

Then the Rav pointed a finger at himself and said proudly: "I am from the tribe of Levi!"

Then the Chafetz Chaim explained: "Three thousand years ago, Moshe Rabbeinu descended from Har Sinai and saw many Jews dancing around a golden calf. He called out

!ויקח ויבא וי

Whoever is for HaShem let him come forward (to punish the wicked).

The Chofetz Chaim continued: "My grandfather ran to be with Moshe, and because of his decision, 3000 years later I am a kohen from the tribe of Levi. However, your grandfather decided not to come forward.

You, young man, are at the crossroads of your future. What you decide now will have lasting effects and implications on you,

on your children, and future generation down the line”.

Dear young Jews in the galut:

The war we are fighting is not just an Israeli issue. It is a declaration of intent to finish what Hitler did not do: to destroy every Jew wherever he might be. It is a war against you and your family. If Hamas comes out of this war intact, then every Moslem neighborhood in the west will become radicalized and your home will be a target.

Medinat Yisrael and Tzahal need you. And unknown to you at this time, you will need the Medina in the not too distant future.

Put university on hold. Tzahal is facing many challenges. It is now your time to step forward and write your personal chapter in Jewish history. To tell your grandchildren what you did in this war against those who would destroy our holy nation; and become the hero of the family – “Do you know what Saba did when he was young”?

BRIT AND THE LAND OF ISRAEL

Vayikra 26:42:

אֲנִי אֶזְכֹּר אֶת-בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי אִתְּךָ יִצְחָק וְאֶת-בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי אִתְּךָ אַבְרָהָם וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ אֲזָכָר׃

“I will remember My covenant with Ya’akov as well as My covenant with Yitzchak and My covenant with Avraham. And I will remember the Land.

Three questions on this verse:

1- The order of the patriarchs is chronologically reversed. The verse begins with Ya’akov, the third generation, continues

with his father Yitzchak, and concludes with Avraham, the first generation. Why?

2- The subject of the verse is the patriarchs, so why is the Land of Israel mentioned?

3- This verse is understood to provide encouragement and hope. Why then does it appear in the Tochacha, the terrible chapter of rebuke from Parashat Be'Chukotai (Vayikra 26?)

I suggest:

The straightforward meaning of the word Hebrew "brit" in the verse is "covenant;" a reference to brit milah, circumcision, as a sign of the covenant between HaShem and Am Yisrael.

Ya'akov was born circumcised (Bereisheit Rabbah 84, et. al.), which is a rare, even a miraculous phenomenon, such that Ya'akov deserves to appear first in the verse.

His father, Yitzchak, was circumcised on the proper eighth day after his birth, as the Torah commands us, without any miracle; his place in the verse follows Ya'akov.

At the other extreme, Avraham's circumcision was not miraculous, neither did it occur on the eighth day. Avraham was 99 years old, and his circumcision was a difficult procedure, so much so that HaShem, Himself, saw fit to fulfill the mitzvah of visiting the sick on the third day after the circumcision. It was thus appropriate for Avraham to appear last in the verse.

The Jewish people entered the Land of Israel as a nation three times. The first was with Yehoshua bin Nun, the second with Ezra the Scribe and Nechemiah, and the third is occurring in our own time, following 2000 years of exile and Shoah.

Entering the Land in Yehoshua's day was accompanied by open miracles, such as HaShem's stopping the flow of the Jordan River, and the victories over Jericho and the rest of the

Canaanite population.

Almost 1000 years later, Ezra and Nechemiah and their generation received a permit from Cyrus and Darius the second, Kings of Persia, to return to the Land of Israel and rebuild the Holy Temple, without open miracles.

The third entrance into the land began 150 years ago when the Jewish people had their fill of suffering after 2000 years of exile. There were no visible miracles nor permits – only blood, sweat, and a Holocaust.

The People's miraculous arrival in the Land with Yehoshua, parallels Ya'akov's being born circumcised, which was miraculous. Ezra's arrival with Cyrus's permit paralleled Yitzchak's circumcision, which occurred conventionally on the eighth day. In our day, our return to the Land parallels the circumcision of Avraham, who was elderly, sick and in pain. It thus turns out that this verse, on the whole, does not arouse happy thoughts, so its place in the Tochacha is appropriate.

All this is alluded to by three words at the end of the verse, which we translate, "And I will remember the Land". Our return to the Land three times parallels the circumcisions of the patriarchs: one miraculous, a second conventional, and a third involving great tribulations.

The return to our homeland after 2000 years in exile is unprecedented in the annals of human history. It is a challenge, as was the pain of Avraham. But as the torah states, HaShem gave us this holy land only when Avraham entered into an eternal holy bond with HaShem. We today, are continuing to uphold this bond, despite the enmity of so many goyim in the world.

And we will prevail because we are HaShem's chosen nation!

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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