

BS"D Parashat Balak 5782

Take My Hand

Diminutive in size but giant in spirit, our beloved Medinat Yisrael has made the world stand still (figuratively) more than once since its re-establishment 74 years ago.

The world looked on in disbelief when, in 1948, a mere handful of fighters with limited weapons and resources trounced the standing armies of seven Arab nations. At the end of the British Mandate on May 14th, 1948, "His Majesty" King George the Fifth's army waited in ships off the coast of Haifa to be implored by the beleaguered, desperate Jews to return and save them from annihilation. They have grown old waiting.

Once again, we figuratively made the world stand still in the Six Day War (interesting to note that the war in Afghanistan was in its 10th year), when our young flying angels destroyed the combined Air Forces of all the Arab states in the Middle East in two hours on the morning of the 26th of Iyar 5727. The "mouths" of the world's leaders dropped in incredulous disbelief, not only at the military success, but even more at the fact that HaShem had restored His people to much of the Biblical lands of Eretz Yisrael.

In one of the boldest and most successful military operations of all time was the daring feat that occurred on the 6th of Tamuz 5736 (July 4, 1976). Israeli planes carried 100 commandos over 4,000 kilometers (2,500 miles) to Uganda for the rescue of 106 Jews who were kidnapped by German and Arab terrorists to Entebbe, Uganda. The "Hand of Hashem" commanded that legendary military operation.

The world now stands at attention when perusing the statistics of what 7 million Jews have accomplished in every important

field of endeavor, in a land almost devoid of natural resources – save for the Yiddishe Kop (mental agility and common sense) of its children.

The revival of Torah life and scholarship after the Shoah, our military and all that that implies, science, technology, the humanities, democratic institutions, financial stability, a growing economy, a super strong shekel and, above all, the happiness and satisfaction level of its citizens are amazing accomplishments, especially on the background of a tenuous security situation.

We have indeed stopped the world in its tracks several times, figuratively. However, even more impressive, HaShem literally “stopped the world” for us 3300 years ago.

The Book of Joshua (chapter 10) relates that five city states of the Amorites attacked the Jewish people. Yehoshua’s army was devastating the enemy, but as night approached, Yehoshua feared that many of them would escape under cover of darkness. Yehoshua appealed to HaShem to halt the sun’s and moon’s movements in order to continue in daylight until the Jewish army could complete the destruction of the enemy. And so it was, that the sun and moon stood fixed in their places, or in modern scientific terms, the earth stopped rotating for a period of time, creating the appearance that the heavenly bodies were at rest.

Today, the 3rd of Tamuz, at the writing of these words, is the anniversary of that miraculous happening. The day the world stood still!

There is a concept called “the invisible hand”. It originally appeared in the book “An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations”, authored in 1776 by the renowned economist Adam Smith.

The essence of the book was to promote a non-regulatory economic system, based on the premise that there is an

“invisible hand” (unexplainable phenomena) that guides the divergent economic forces in society to an end that provides the most good for the most people. Or stated plainly: Leave the economy alone – it will take care of itself.

The term “invisible hand” has been applied generally to any action whose consequences were unplanned and unintended, even not wanted. But they just happened (the definition of coincidence is the way HaShem directs the world while remaining anonymous). The “invisible hand” looms larger than life in the history and survival of the Jewish nation. The “Invisible Hand” of HaShem was at work when the heavenly bodies stopped in their tracks to help the Jewish people defeat the five Amorite nations. It was the “Invisible Hand” that guided our fathers in their wandering in the desert, and the Hand that guaranteed our survival in the long 2000-year galut and opened the gates of Eretz Yisrael for us to enter.

Balak and Bil'am both learned “the hard way” of the “Invisible Hand” that protects the Jewish people.

Bil'am used all of his experience as an arch messenger of bad tidings to curse the nation that HaShem had blessed. The consequences of his efforts were “unplanned and unintended”. Every anathema, blasphemy, damnation, denunciation, obscenity, profanation, and vilification that his evil mind sought to express emerged from his mouth as blessings!

The Gemara (Brachot 7a) states that Bil'am's success as a master of vilifying, was due to his knowledge of the one, instantaneous split second of time that HaShem angers every day. And Bil'am would curse at that time. But what Bil'am did not know was that during the forty years the Jewish people were in the desert, HaShem did not bring forth the quality of anger even when the people sinned. The “Invisible Hand” of HaShem was at work.

In my lifetime, I have seen the “Invisible Hand” at work in

quite ordinary situations of life.

Here are just three:

One of our granddaughters graduated from the elementary school in the Old City of Yerushalayim, and the class presented a play depicting an incident that occurred when the Romans conquered the city. It was quite inspiring to see the talent that these 11–12-year-olds are gifted with – but that's not the story.

While viewing the play, I became overwhelmed by the thought that while there is no one in this wide world who can claim with any veracity that they are a descendant of the ancient Romans who destroyed the Bet Hamikdash and sent our people into a 2000-year exile, these young children on stage who have returned to live and study in the Old City, are direct descendants of the Kohanim and Levi'im who served in the Bet Hamikdash, and of the Jewish people who brought their sacrifices to the Bet Hamikdash. Is this not the "Invisible Hand" of HaShem at work?

The following night I was invited to speak at the home of Abba and Pamela Claman, two extraordinary people who have devoted themselves, through many diverse activities, in expressing their and our love and honor to our soldiers. They were hosting two seemingly very diverse groups. One was the crew of a "Jewish" submarine, and the other a group of about 50 young college aged men and women from across the USA. When I arrived, the two groups of Jewish young people were sitting on the roof eating a sumptuous meal, in the Claman tradition. What could I say to two groups, one of which would be spending their nights learning the secret codes of the Israeli Navy and then submerging into the deep waters of the oceans to protect Am Yisrael, while the other would be planning their next Saturday night dates? But in reality, as diverse as they might seem, they have more in common than that which makes them different.

I spoke of the “Invisible Hand” of HaShem that sustains us today as it has done for over 3300 years. I spoke of our common destiny; that what happens to Medinat Yisrael affects every Jew in the world, regardless of their religious observance or non-observance. I quoted the second verse in the Torah, that the earth was covered with water and the spirit of HaShem hovered over the waters; and that these young submariners take the spirit of HaShem even below the waters. I told them that education is the planting of a seed, but it is up to the individual to decide if he or she wants to nurture that seed or let it wither away.

The third incident occurred when my wife and I were at the remarkable Israel Museum. We arrived at the meticulously constructed model of Yerushalayim during the Second Temple period, put together with over one million pieces of stone. There was a group of older high school aged boys and girls from the US, listening to their guide who was explaining what they were viewing. He was very informative regarding the buildings and streets etc., but I felt that the neshama (spirit) was missing. I asked the guide for permission to say a few words and, surprisingly, he agreed.

I told these youngsters that my wife and I were born in the USA, just like them; but came to Eretz Yisrael many years ago. Our only regret was that we didn't come sooner. Their bored look started to turn into a more positive one, so I continued. I spoke of our 3300-year history and that we were chosen by HaShem to be His unique nation, as proven by our return to the Promised Land by the “Invisible Hand” of HaShem. The seed was taking root – the group was smiling and clapping.

Indeed, the “Invisible Hand” is always outstretched, but there is a condition.

The Torah says (Devarim 15:18)

וְיָשָׁבְךָ אֶל-אֲדָמְךָ וְיָשָׁבְךָ אֶל-אֲדָמְךָ וְיָשָׁבְךָ אֶל-אֲדָמְךָ וְיָשָׁבְךָ אֶל-אֲדָמְךָ

HaShem will indeed bless us, but we have to initiate and do.

Had Moshe not gone out of his way to approach the burning bush, there would not have been an exodus.

Had Nachshon ben Aminadav not jumped into the churning waters of the Red Sea, the waters would not have split.

Had the first chalutzim (pioneers) not dried out the malarial swamps in the Chula Valley, there would be no skyscrapers today in Tel Aviv.

If you live in New York, LA, Cleveland, London, Paris, Sao Paulo, etc., you will never realize your Jewish potential; and it would be a life wasted.

In conclusion:

A man fell into a deep pit, and the rescue workers failed to extract him because for some reason he did not cooperate. When hope was all but lost, an onlooker asked for permission to try and pull him out. He approached the pit and in an instant the poor fellow was out. Upon being asked by the police how he succeeded in getting the man's cooperation, he asked the police what they said to the man in the pit. The officer in charge replied, "I told him again and again 'give me your hand', but to no avail". Then the hero said "that was your mistake. I said to him, '**Take** my hand'".

The spiritual situation in which the Jewish people now find ourselves after such a long galut, makes it almost impossible for us to initiate "giving a hand to HaShem". So HaShem brought about the greatest miracle since Biblical times – the return of the Jewish people to our ancient homeland.

By this HaShem is beckoning to us, "**Take** My Outstretched Hand".

Am Yisrael Chai!

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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