

BS”D Parashat Devarim 5782

The Making of a Rasha

The book of Devarim opens on the first day of the month of Shevat, with Moshe Rabbeinu standing before the nation to begin his 37-day farewell speech, which was concluded on the seventh of Adar – the day Moshe ascended Mount Nevo where his holy soul departed from this world.

Moshe began by alluding to the unfortunate events which constitute HaShem’s **Hall of Infamy** (Devarim 1:1):

וְעַתָּה אֲנִי בְּעֵינֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵלֶיךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
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These are the words Moshe spoke to all Israel in the desert east of the Jordan, in the Arabah opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Lavan, and Chazerot and Dizahab

Rashi comments that Moshe alluded to the nation’s sins, but deliberately refrained from specifically citing them in deference to their elevated status as Hashem’s chosen nation. As he was speaking it became painfully aware that Moshe was referring to their disastrous conduct at Bet Pe’or, their ungrateful attitude for the Manna, the repeated desire to return to Egypt, and much more.

Moshe’s intention was not to castigate the people for past sins, but to emphasize that despite their betrayals and transgressions Hashem still loved them. The proof being that HaShem repeatedly accepted their petitions for teshuva and forgiveness and has brought them now on the banks of the Jordan river.

Over the years, societies develop their own Halls of Infamy, as the case may be. Take a tour of Madame Tussaud's museums in places such as London or New York where influential people from all walks of life have their figures molded in wax.

The Jewish Hall of Infamy begins with Nimrod of Mesopotamia who threw Avraham Avinu into a fiery furnace; Avimelech at the time of Yitzchak Avinu, Lavan who made Ya'akov Avinu's life miserable, and the Egyptian king who enslaved our fathers.

The list goes on to include the arch anti-Semites of each generation: Nevuchadnetzer the destroyer of the first holy Temple; Haman and Achashverosh of the Purim episode; Antiochus of the Chanuka episode; and the Roman general Titus, destroyer of the second Holy Temple.

The list includes popes, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, local Catholic priests, Moslem caliphs, kings, knights, emperors, czars, presidents, chancellors, chairmen of the party, sheikhs and just plain folks who murdered Jews for the fun of it.

We know the history of what these people did to our fellow Jews, but rarely did we gain insight into the making of the step-by-step transformation of a world, led by the United Nations, descending down the slippery slope of no-return, into hell.

We are eyewitnesses to the metamorphosis of a seemingly well-intentioned organization of intelligent peoples, into the infamous blocs of nations that sees all of the world's ills as stemming from a tiny (in number) nation on the eastern end of the Mediterranean.

HaShem grades us according to the degree that our lives conform with the purpose for which He created the world. HaShem is compassionate. So too must we be compassionate. Hashem is just. So too must we strive for justice.

HaShem chose the Jewish nation as His own. So, humanity is graded in the manner in which they deal with the Jewish people.

One could argue that HaShem cannot expect people of different races and religions to carry the Jewish people on their shoulders, when the Jews themselves behave inappropriately for a Torah-centered people. The argument is valid. But it cannot justify the ongoing systematic attempts of the goyim to eradicate the Jewish nation. It cannot justify the united effort of the "enlightened" world to condemn every attempt of the State of Israel to defend its right to life and liberty.

It cannot justify the US president's dictates to the Jewish people to refrain from living normal lives.

Two days ago, it was "no new settlements" in the land which was given to us by the Creator of all lands. Yesterday, it was "no building of any kind in the settlements of Yehuda and Shomron". And today, it is "no more building in the municipal area of Yerushalayim". Tomorrow it will be "pack your belongings and don't forget to turn off the lights when you leave Ben Gurion Airport".

In the last century, we witnessed the quick and dramatic making of a rasha, when Hitler advanced from being an unknown corporal in the German army to the man who orchestrated the death of over 7 million of our people in the Shoah.

And now we are witnessing the transformation of another mad Iranian stepping into the shoes of a past one – Haman of Persia. Iran shows no discomfort or reservation as they admit to building the tools to destroy all the Jews in Eretz Yisrael "in one day", as stated by Haman. And as this is happening, the enlightened democratic peoples of the world are blind to see that the Iranians scream "Israel," but they intend the first bombs to be targeted at the Christian nations of Europe and the US.

Madame Tussaud had it right when she decided to sculpt her heroes in wax; because just as wax melts, so does the might of evil men and nations. However, the status of a rasha against the Jewish people is engraved in eternal concrete in the Hall of Infamy in Olam Haba, where there is no forgetting or forgiving.

Despite it all, we in Eretz Yisrael will continue to build our homes, our shuls, our sky-scrappers in preparation for the Bet Hamikdash building on the Temple Mount.

I recall visiting with our eldest son, Efrayim, who was the project manager of the luxurious Waldorf Astoria Hotel in Yerushalayim. The oversized table in his office was crowded with architectural and engineering plans, as the sounds of the huge cranes and earthmovers ascended from the construction site. In addition to all the nachat I feel as a father, there is another dimension to the whole scene. The chief construction engineer was a kohen, the contractor was a kohen, and my son the project manager is a kohen.

While I was sitting quietly trying to picture the building as it might appear from my understanding of the plans and thinking my personal thoughts. After a few minutes, my son turned to me and said (in Ivrit, of course), "Abba, I know what you are thinking. All the years of building big projects in Eretz Yisrael were meant for us to gain the professional skills and experience for building the Bet HaMikdash. I also believe so."

(Rambam, based on the Gemara, lists the halachic preference of artisans for constructing the Bet HaMikdash. At the top of the list are kohanim).

So, at the end of the day, if you are asked to choose who will rise and who will fall? The answer is written in the Shamayim – Am Yisrael Chai! And it is we who place the last shovels of soil over the graves of our enemies!

The Centrality of a Torah Life in Eretz Yisrael

The prophet Zecharia 2:5-17:

“And I (Zecharia) looked up, and there before me was (an angel in the form of) a man with a measuring line in his hand. I asked, “Where are you going?”

He answered me, “To measure Jerusalem, to find out how wide and how long it is.”

While the angel who was speaking to me was leaving, another angel came to meet him and said to him: “Run, tell that young man (Zecharia), that you have erred because, ‘Jerusalem will be a city without walls (and will not be measured) because of the great number of people and animals in it. And I myself (HaShem) will be a wall of fire around it,’ declares the Lord, ‘and I will be its glory within.’

“Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north,” declares the Lord, “for I have scattered you to the four winds of heaven (lands of our exile),” declares the Lord.

“Come, Zion! Escape, you who live in Daughter Babylon! (a metaphor for all the lands of our exile).

And Zecharia continues.

For this is what the Lord Almighty says: “After the Glorious One has sent me (Zecharia to give prophecy) against the nations that have plundered you for whoever touches you (Yisrael) touches (destroys) the apple of his eye. I will surely raise my hand against them so that their slaves (the Moslem infiltrators) will plunder them. Then you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me.

“Shout and be glad, Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you,” declares the Lord. “Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people. (However) I will live (only) among you, and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you.

The Lord will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem.

Zecharia was sent by HaShem to inform the nation that HaShem dwells only with His people in Eretz Yisrael.

One cannot escape the centrality of living a life of Torah in Eretz Yisrael as HaShem’s reason for creating the world.

Whosoever wishes to be loved by our Father in Heaven has no choice but to be in His promised land, as Moshe Rabbeinu so much longed to be.

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Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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