

# BS"D Parashat Ki Tai'tzai 5785

## Spiritual Lighthouses

Despite our differences here in the medina, there is at least one common issue that draws us together.

I can best explain this by an incident that occurred years ago, when my wife and I were (spectators) on the ski slope on Mount Hermon in the upper Golan 2000 meters above sea level (Yerushalayim is 800 meters above sea level). Suddenly a cloud descended over the entire area and visibility was only about one meter.

The locals informed us that the condition could continue for several hours, while we had to return to Tzfat shortly. The drive down the mountain at near zero visibility was challenging, where one mistake could be the last. Toda laShem we made it, obviously!

The connection: All of us in Eretz Yisrael, from newly arrived to Israeli old timers are surrounded by a clueless cloud as to what tomorrow could bring. The possibilities are endless, and it makes sense only to us who realize that the situation was brought about by HaShem in order that we become aware that our destiny is in His hands, exclusively.

But there are spiritual lighthouses to strengthen us along the way, and I submit one of them.

*Shlomo HaMelech states in Mishlay (13,20):*

הַחָכָם יִשְׁכָּן עִם חָכָם ,וְהַכֹּסֵף יִשְׁכָּן עִם הָאִשָּׁה

***"He who walks with the wise will be wise, but the companion***

*of fools will suffer harm”.*

The message is clear – choose only good and clever people as friends.

Cicero the Roman is credited with a similar thought: “Tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are”. And its corollary “Tell me who your enemies are, and I will tell you who you are”, which is the subject of this week’s message.

The Gemara (Gitin 56b) recounts Rabban (a title reserved for the head of the Sanhedrin) Yochanan ben Zakkai’s secretive exit from the besieged Yerushalayim in order to meet with the Roman general Vespasian.

When Rabban greeted him with the title “king”, Vespasian showed his annoyance at this false title. Rabban explained that he was a king or will soon be one, and as they were speaking a messenger arrived from Rome informing Vespasian that Ceasar had died and the Senate had appointed him as emperor. Vespasian was taken aback and asked Rabban how he knew of this development?

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai responded that it is obvious that you will conquer Yerushalayim; and our tradition, based on verses, teaches that only a great monarch (king) could have control over the holy city when the Jews are in galut.

This is a powerful statement about the unique status of Yerushalayim and Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael. It declares that even when we are punished for our sins, HaShem chooses only the elite of enemies (major leagues) to implement the divine decree.

## **Our Enemies Throughout History**

Throughout the centuries of our galut, Yerushalayim was ruled over by powerful, influential kings.

After the fall of Rome came the Byzantine emperors: Constantine, Julian, Theodosius the second, Justinian and Heraclius.

Followed by Early Muslim Caliphates. In 637 CE, Jerusalem was conquered by the Rashidun Caliphate under Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab.

Followed by a succession of Islamic dynasties, including the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates, and the Fatimid dynasty.

Then came the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem (1099-1187 CE). Its first ruler was Godfrey of Bouillon, followed by His brother, Baldwin I.

Crusader rule lasted for nearly a century until the city was recaptured by Saladin, founder of the Ayyubid dynasty and the first Sultan of both Egypt and Syria. He unified the Muslim territories of Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia, and parts of Arabia, which had been fragmented under different rulers.

Then the city was captured by the Ottoman Turks during the Ottoman-Mamluk War of 1516-1517. The Ottomans, led by Sultan Selim I, defeated the Mamluk Sultanate in a series of battles. After the decisive Ottoman victory at the Battle of Marj Dabiq in August 1516, the Ottoman forces advanced and conquered much of the Levant, including Jerusalem.

This marked the beginning of a 400 year long period of Ottoman rule over Jerusalem, until the British captured the city in 1917 during World War I, and were given the status of mandate government under King George V (reigned 1910), followed by Edward VIII (reigned 1936, but abdicated after less than a year) and the last mandate King George VI.

### *Conclusion:*

It is beneath HaShem's and Am Yisrael's "dignity" to permit His chosen people to deal with the minor leagues of history.

Remember: “Tell me who your enemies are, and I will tell you who you are”,

Our first nemesis was the super-power – Egypt, which fell to the bottom of the sea while we were singing with Moshe in praise of HaShem.

We fought and destroyed the two kings Og and Sichon, who protected the eastern approaches to Eretz Yisrael and then we destroyed the 31 city-states in the land.

We fought Bavel, and we were conquered by them and by the Persians. We fought Greece and then Rome and one can now see them in our Yerushalayim museums.

We were degraded by the Byzantines and the Christian popes and European kings.

We suffered under the Turkish caliphate and after that we succeeded in expelling the brutish-British from our land.

We met them all and we wrote the history books.

## **Our Enemies Today**

In our time the “influential” kings are: Salman of Saudi Arabia, Hassanal Bolkiah of Brunei, Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani of Qatar, Charles III of the United Kingdom, Emperor Naruhito of Japan, Abdullah II of Jordan and Mohammed VI of Morocco, so, I don’t see any reason to worry.

In reality, we are forever governed by the King of Kings, before whom the mightiest emperors crawl on their knees.

## **PART TWO – THE MITZVA TO ERADICATE ALL SEMBLANCE OF AMALEK IN THE**

# PARASHA

Halacha recognizes two types of war – milchemet mitzva (obligatory war) and milchemet reshut (optional war).

Milchemet mitzva is defined by Rambam as the war against the seven Canaanite nations led by Yehoshua bin Nun in Eretz Yisrael; war against any enemy which is threatening Jews, and war against Amalek.

Since milchemet mitzva does not need the consent of the Sanhedrin, the king or government may declare war and draft soldiers. Two options are offered to the enemy: either to leave the area completely or remain as our slaves; or to wage war, in which case we would destroy every man, woman and child of that nation.

Milchemet reshut is a war of expansion for territorial or economic interests and conditional on the consent of the Sanhedrin. If the enemy rejects our conditions for peace, we are required to destroy all the men, but not the women and children.

Our parasha begins with milchemet reshut and ends with milchemet mitzva against our sworn enemy Amalek.

<sup>51</sup> “Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: ‘You will cross the Jordan into Canaan, <sup>52</sup> And you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you and possess it. Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols and demolish all their high places. <sup>53</sup> Take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess. <sup>54</sup> Distribute the land by lot, according to your families. To the larger give a larger inheritance, and to the smaller a smaller one. Whatever falls to them by lot will be theirs. Distribute it according to your ancestral tribes. <sup>55</sup> But if you do not drive out the

inhabitants of the land, those who will remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you anguish, you in the land where you live. <sup>56</sup> And then I will do to you what I plan to do to them.'

We were commanded to liquidate the enemy as a preemptive act, for in accordance to their religious faith and culture they are devoid of any and all feelings of human compassion and will have no mercy on our women and children.

The great Yehoshua, who followed Moshe Rabbeinu as the religious and military head of the Jewish nation, gathered together the nation's rabbis and tribal heads to instruct them how to lead the nation after his demise. The Jewish people had liberated five tribal areas, leaving seven more which were to be conquered and settled after the demise of Yeshua bin Nun.

Yehoshua said:

After a time and the Lord had given Israel respite from all their enemies around them, Joshua, by then a very old man, <sup>2</sup> summoned all Israel—their elders, leaders, judges and officials and said to them: "I am very old. <sup>3</sup> You have seen what the Lord your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the Lord your God who fought for you. <sup>4</sup> Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea in the west. <sup>5</sup> The Lord your God himself will push them out for your sake. He will drive them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the Lord your God promised you.

<sup>6</sup> "Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. <sup>7</sup> Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods

or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them.

<sup>8</sup> But you are to hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have until now.

<sup>9</sup> “The Lord has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. <sup>10</sup> One of you routs a thousand, because the Lord your God fights for you, just as he promised. <sup>11</sup> So be very careful to love the Lord your God.

<sup>12</sup> “But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, <sup>13</sup> then you may be sure that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the Lord your God has given you.

<sup>14</sup> “Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. <sup>15</sup> But just as all the good things the Lord your God has promised you have come to you, so he will bring on you all the evil things he has threatened, until the Lord your God has destroyed you from this good land he has given you. <sup>16</sup> If you violate the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the Lord’s anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land He has given you.”

HaShem, through both Moshe and Yehoshua, directed the Jewish people how to deal with the enemies in Eretz Yisrael. It is a question of “either them or us”. There is no third

alternative. We cannot live with the enemy nor share the land with him, in any generation. To do so would be an ungrateful act of disloyalty to HaShem and a disruption of the heavenly plans which HaShem has set into motion for His people Yisrael.

In the War of Independence, we had the opportunity to execute a population exchange, when we gathered in hundreds of thousands of Jews who were thrown out from Moslem lands. in exchange for the Arabs who were here. Had the government abided by the letter and spirit of the Torah, we would not be in the position we are in today.

The opportunity presented itself again during the Yom Kippur War, when we could have rid ourselves of the hostile Arab population; but again, the leaders did not have the courage to walk in the ways of the Torah.

What would Moshe and Yehoshua say to the idea of freeing hundreds of murderers, as our leaders are willing to do today?

It would not be wrong to say that Moshe and Yehoshua would claim that the rightful place for these murderers is neither to be free nor to be in prison. Their place is to be in Gehennom now.

We are not permitted to test HaShem. However, the longer we live, the more the truth of His commandments become revealed in our day-to-day life. It is not only the rasha (evil person) who denies the words of Hashem, but also the well-meaning righteous fool.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

Copyright © 5785/2025 Nachman Kahana