

# BS"D Parashat Va'et'chanan 5784

## Use it or lose it

An orthopedist will tell you to “use it or lose it” – exercise or the limb will eventually undergo atrophy or even necrosis (death of the cells).

So, the title of this week's message is “Use it or Lose it”.

## Exiled

The great and traumatic crisis that faces Am Yisrael today is the mass departure and abandonment of millions of US Jews from their religious-historical-national ties to Judaism via intermarriage and related avenues leading to the golden gate of assimilation. Why is this happening just now when the Jewish people are freer to serve HaShem and fulfill our religious responsibilities than in any previous time in the past 2000 years?

I submit:

On Monday of next week, we commemorate the festive day of the 15th of Menachem Av. It is, as stated in the Mishna (Ta'anit), one of the two happiest days in the Jewish calendar year – the other being Yom Kippur.

The Talmud Yerushalmi in Ta'anit states that the 15th of Av is a joyous day because of several positive things that occurred on it – one of them being the edict proclaimed by Hoshea ben Elah last king of the ten northern tribes (7th century BCE).

The Gemara explains that on this day King Hoshea rescinded a decree prohibiting the Jews of the northern tribes to go to Yerushalayim.

In order to fully appreciate what this meant, we have to return to 300 years prior to the time of Hoshea's reign. The arch-rasha (evildoer), Yeravam ben Navat, incited the people of the northern tribes to secede from the union which was under the monarchy of Rechav'am son of King Shlomo.

To complete the secession, Yeravam began interpreting the Torah in his own way. However, the formal act of secession was accomplished by closing the roads to Yerushalayim and creating two idolatrous centers – one in Bet El and the other at Dan in the north.

Yeravam knew that as long as the connection to Yerushalayim existed, his breakaway nation would not endure. Yeravam prohibited anyone from trying to go to Yerushalayim by stationing police and soldiers along the entire border .

This situation continued for over 300 years, during which time the Jews of the north were severed from Yerushalayim and the Bet Hamikdash.

When Hoshea ben Elah ascended the throne, he withdrew the border guards and opened the way to Yerushalayim. This occurred on the 15th of Av. Indeed, this is a day to parallel Yom Kippur, for now the Jews would be able to offer korbanot in the Mikdash and achieve atonement (kapara) for their sins.

After this explanation in the Talmud, a rabbi whose name was Rav Kahana asked that if Hoshea ben Elah was such a great man, why did HaShem permit King Shalmaneser of Assyria to invade the northern tribes and exile all the Jews?

The Talmud answers that although Hoshea ben Elah did open the way to Yerushalayim, NO ONE CAME. The king was held personally responsible, because he did not use his authority to coerce

his citizens to renew their connection with the holy city.

The Gemara explains that in the 300 years when pilgrimage to the holy city was prohibited by the evil kings, the heavenly bet din (court) could not accuse the northerners of neglecting their responsibilities to Yerushalayim. But now that the government permitted the free movement of people to the holy city, there was no longer an excuse for not going. It was as if HaShem was saying, "You did not come to My house, so I will eject you from your houses", or "Use it or Lose it" – and exiled the Jews to the far-flung lands in the east.

Seventy-six years ago, the gates to Eretz Yisrael were thrown open to all Jews. The call was sounded to return home and receive immediate citizenship under the "The Law of Return".

Very few came home from the western countries. In fact, the year my wife and I came on aliya in 1962, a mere 677 people came from the millions of Jews in the US.

And like the last king of the northern tribes, who HaShem held responsible for not using his authority to force his subjects to reunite with Yerushalayim, the orthodox spiritual leaders in the communities of the U.S. will be held accountable for the sin of not encouraging their adherents to come on Aliya.

HaShem exiled the Jews from Eretz Yisrael 2500 years ago for not going up to Yerushalayim. Although this dire sin is being repeated daily by the Jews in western countries, HaShem cannot use the same punishment today as He did with the ten tribes, for the simple reason that they are already in exile.

So, the question is what is a fitting punishment – short of another Shoah – for a people already in exile?

The answer is exile not only from the Jewish homeland, but absolute disenfranchisement from the Jewish nation through assimilation.

In a sense, assimilation is not only a cause for punishment, it is the punishment that HaShem thrusts upon those who He wants to regurgitate from His chosen people. The punishment for the unaffiliated and “liberal” streams of Judaism is intermarriage and being lost forever to the Jewish nation.

For the religious Jew who does not come on aliya, there is a similar punishment. HaShem provides them with religious leaders who reject the mitzva of now living in the Holy Land, based on distorted halachic reasonings such as “wait for the Mashiach” or “there is chillul Shabbat in Israel”.

This leads to the inevitability that their adherents will remain in the galut until their children or grandchildren eventually inter-marry and disappear.

But assimilation can take time; so, when the need arrives to hasten the Jews’ return home there is always the dependable “trump card” called anti-Semitism.

“The American Jewish community is facing a threat level that is now unprecedented in modern history”, said Jonathan Greenblatt, ADL CEO. It is shocking that we have recorded more antisemitic acts in three months than we usually would in an entire year.”

So dear brothers and sisters in the galut never forget

“USE IT OR LOSE IT”

Shabbat Nachamu Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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