

BS"D Parashat Vayaitzai 5783

Rejecting a Divine Invitation

Four historical episodes occurred, apart in time and place, but very similar:

1) The "day of freedom" was designated by HaShem to be the 15th of Nisan, when millions of Am Yisrael would leave Egypt, thereby terminating 210 years of debilitating slavery. The future of Am Yisrael was sealed forever to be the Creator's chosen nation. However, 80% of the Jews refused to venture into the treacherous desert and died during the week-long plague of darkness.

An unprecedented invitation by HaShem had been rejected by most of His people.

2) When Rechav'am, son of King Solomon, ascended the throne, Yeravam ben Navat led the northern tribes in seceding from the united kingdom of David and Shlomo. In order to solidify the secession, Yeravam created a surrogate Bet Hamikdashim in the cities of Bet El and Dan and prohibited the people of the north from going up to Yerushalayim.

The Mishna in Tractate Ta'anit states that the 15th of Av was one of the two happiest days in the Jewish calendar, with the other being Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The Gemara explains that on this day, Hoshea ben Ela, the last king of the ten northern tribes, rescinded the 200-year-old prohibition enacted by Yeravam ben Navat, and permitted the people of the northern tribes to go up to Yerushalayim.

If Hoshea was such a great man, asks Rav Kahana in the

Yerushalmi Ta'anit, why during his reign was Shalmanetzer, King of Assyria, permitted to conquer and exile all the Jews of the northern tribes whose whereabouts are unknown to this day?

The Talmud answers that Hoshea ben Ela opened the way to Yerushalayim – BUT NO ONE CAME.

Hoshea ben Ela was personally held accountable for not imposing his authority by forcing people to renew their covenant with the holy city and for the sin of the people not reuniting with Yerushalayim.

Another invitation by HaShem had been rejected by His people!

3) The second of November is the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. In 1917, a letter was sent from the United Kingdom's Foreign Secretary Arthur James Balfour to Baron Walter Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community, for transmission to the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland. It begins: "His Majesty's government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object..."

The British permitted unlimited immigration until the mid-1920s. In 1919, the number of Jews who came was 1,806; in 1923 it rose to 8,175; and from the Balfour Declaration until 1939, the number of olim was less than 300,000! By then, the Holocaust had descended upon the Jewish people.

Yet another invitation by HaShem had been rejected by His people.

4) In 1967, HaShem invited Am Yisrael to return home, when in the aftermath of our miraculous military victories, He restored Yerushalayim, Yehuda, Shomron and the Golan to Jewish sovereignty. There should have been mass aliya of millions of Jews to settle these lands. However, the number of olim was

dismal.

The fourth rejection of Am Yisrael of a generous invitation by HaShem!

And the result is a devastating holocaust. Not one of bloodshed, because the Jewish nation cannot bear another Shoah. This ongoing holocaust is assimilation, where 70-80% of non-orthodox Jews in the U.S. and other parts of the world are marrying gentiles. We can't see smoke and ash rising from crematoria, but the result is the same, the loss of future generations of Jews!

As profound as the essence of Judaism is, it can be stated succinctly as follows: HaShem chose the Jewish nation and commanded us to perform His mitzvot in Eretz Yisrael.

Any deviation from this formula is a perversion of the Torah.

Ya'akov's Dreams

In parashat Vayetzei, our father Ya'akov experienced two dreams. In the first, he saw HaShem's angels ascending to heaven and descending to this world. In the second, he saw how he could increase the number of animals in his herd.

The vast difference between the dreams is that the first of ascending and descending angels occurred when Ya'akov was in Eretz Yisrael, but when in chutz la'aretz even the great Ya'akov dreamed of increasing his herd of animals.

Divine Justice

At this time in our history, HaShem has placed before His children of Israel the historic challenge of restoring our

national independence within the borders of Eretz Yisrael in preparation for the next stage of world history. This stage will witness the execution of Divine justice upon those nations who dealt so cruelly with Am Yisrael, while the Jewish people will be under HaShem's protective wing in Eretz Yisrael.

But confusion is king. Not much different from the time of Chanukah, which we will be celebrating this month. Then, as now, Am Yisrael was faced with an existential threat. A large percentage of our people were drawn to Hellenism and discarded the Torah. Each Jew was faced with the personal challenge to the depths of his faith: to join with the Maccabim at the risk of his life or to be a bystander in the life-and-death struggle for the soul of Am Yisrael.

Through the sacrifices of the strong and courageous, HaShem awarded us independence from foreign rule for over 200 years. And it is because of the mesirat nefesh of those holy people that we celebrate the holiday of Chanukah.

At this juncture in our history, each Jew is again faced with the choice of whether to be Ya'akov or Aisav: to pick up the gauntlet of the strong and courageous or to back off from the responsibility of a bechor (firstborn).

The choice is to join in the struggle to rebuild our nation in Eretz Yisrael or to cringe in the corner ofchutz la'aretz behind the apron strings of one's fears.

It is not easy to be a "Ya'akov" in a world surrounded by Aisavs, but it is the Ya'akovs who will survive and guarantee the eternal existence of Am Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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