

BS"D Parashat Vayakhel 5784

Vayakhel: And He Gathered

The major thrust of my writings is to make us aware of the great religious-national historical revolution that occurred to the Jewish people on the fifth of Iyar 5708 (May 14, 1948), On that holy day, the national mourning that accompanied the ninth of Av for 2000 years took a step backwards when David ben Gurion and the heads of the Jewish agency declared the establishment of the State of Israel, and its first law – the Law of Return – that opened the gates to the holy land for all Jews to come home.

To be sure, Ben Gurion was not the Mashiach, and the Medina will have to do collective teshuva in order to be worthy of the next Bet HaMikdash. However, the rebirth of the State of Israel signaled the end of the forced exile that began 2000 years ago.

The gates of Israel were opened and our mother Rachel's cry for all her children to come home (Yirmiyahu 31) is now loud and clear.

One of the implications of the Medina is that Jews who continue to remain in the galut do so by their own choice, leaving the responsibility for whatever occurs there squarely on their shoulders.

More relevant today

The following is a short story I wrote that is relevant to today's situation:

The phone rang in the nearly empty, topsy-turvy home of the Levines as they prepared for their aliyah to Eretz Yisrael.

Mrs. Beth Levine nervously let the wrapping cord fall from her hand as she ran to answer the phone. Too late. The light on the phone's base signaled that there was a recorded message.

She pushed the "play" button and a familiar voice spoke: "Hello, this is Miri from Nefesh B'Nefesh. I have two messages for you: one happy and the other a bit disappointing. The movers will be coming to your home at exactly 7 a.m. tomorrow morning, so please be ready.

And the not so happy news. I know how much you wanted the three ABC seats by the window and the adjoining D seat in the middle section on this Thursday's flight, because of your names Al, Beth, Carol and David. However, because you are a family of four, you were assigned the four DEFG seats in the middle section. In any event, we know that the thrill of going on aliyah will certainly overshadow such minor irritations. Aliyah tova!"

Miri was so right, Mrs. Levine thought to herself. The thrill of a dream-come-true leaves no room for such mundane issues as seating on a plane, although it would have been nice to see the coastline of Israel drawing closer as the "wings of eagles" brought them home.

Al and Beth Levine had decided to come on aliyah five years

ago, when Carol was ten and David had just celebrated his Bar Mitzvah. However, it took five years for Al to find a suitable replacement in his law firm. In addition, selling the house for the right price was a protracted process; but thank God, the local shul bought it to serve as the community home for any rabbinical replacement.

In the interim, the Levines kept their dream alive by keeping up with current events in Israel, as well as with developments in the Middle East.

Tensions were high. Iran, patron of the murderous Hezbollah and Hamas gangs, continued to develop and increase their nuclear capacity. The United Nations Security Council passed a limited economic boycott resolution against Iran; and in an angry knee-jerk response, the Iranians reduced their sale of oil, causing the world price to jump to \$100 a barrel! As if this was not bad enough, Venezuela's leftist president signed a ten-year agreement to sell its oil exclusively to China, bringing the price of gas at the pump to \$7 a gallon and with no sign that this would be the final price.

None of this could detract from the Levine's decision to come on aliyah.

David is to begin Bar Ilan University right after the holidays, and Carol is registered at the Ulpan in Kiryat Arba. Normally, youngsters of David's age in Israel are drafted into the IDF, but he was promised that he could finish his BA uninterrupted by army service. With this critical issue behind them, there was really nothing to

prevent the Levines from taking the step of a lifetime.

The one annoying factor in their aliya was the attitude of some relatives and friends, who, perhaps for reasons of jealousy or personal weakness, were very critical of their plans. "What's the rush? Wait until the children finish school. You're now at your peak earning power. Is this the time to leave?"

On the other hand, their rabbi was wonderful. On Shabbat, he spoke from the pulpit on the mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisrael. He praised the Levines, saying how they would be missed in the many areas of their community involvement. Al for giving up his Sundays in order to coach the shul's little league team. Beth for being the Shabbat kiddish coordinator. Carol for helping her mother with the kiddishes, and David for managing the shul's teen activities.

Notwithstanding the rabbi's praises, he was careful to point out that the mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisrael was in the category of a four-cornered garment. Although not mandatory to wear, if one should do so, he would be required to attach to it tzitzit in order to merit a mitzvah. So too, one is not required to "go up to the land" until the Mashiach comes, but if one should do so he merits a great mitzvah.

To their skeptical friends and relatives, Al responded that there had been so many warnings of late that the time had come to go home. So, if not now, when?

The following day, true to Miri's message, the movers arrived exactly at 7 a.m. to take all the Levine's worldly possessions to the packing company, and from there to Israel.

Packing was an unforgettable experience.

Beth Levine stood wondering how they had "succeeded" in 20 years of marriage to accumulate so much "stuff". They began in the attic, which served as a nostalgic trip into the past. Many memories were evoked as they rummaged through their possessions. The less-than-modest wedding gown, which Mrs. Levine did not want her Carol to see. A 78 RPM record player, Al's catcher's mitt, which he could not part with. Old photographs from the Pineview and Pioneer Hotels and summer camps. How these experiences had sweetened with time.

But life goes on. And with mental scissors, they would be severed in the light of the new life in the Promised Land.

Eventually, much was given away, more was thrown out, and the necessary articles were now packed in cartons to be shipped off.

In the packing process, the Levines concluded that Moshe Rabbeinu was so right in ordering the Jews to leave with only a few matzot; because if they would have been permitted to bring their possessions, we would still be slaves in Mitzrayim.

Ten in the morning and the movers had finished about half the work. A Western Union messenger suddenly arrived with a telegram for Mr. David Levine.

Al signed for it, opened the envelope, and read it aloud.

“Greetings. You are hereby informed that the President of the United States of America and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and Congress in emergency session, have passed the Selective Service Act of 20.., to be enforced immediately. You are hereby ordered to report on May 14, 20.. to the Induction Center at 1948 Independence Ave. for induction into the armed services for a period of not less than three years. You will be sent to Paris Island, Georgia, to commence basic training as a proud United States Marine. Your passport will be on hold until the completion of your military service. Good luck and God’s speed to you in the service of your country.”

Al handed the telegram to Beth as the phone suddenly rang. He got there too late to answer, but the light on the phone’s base signaled a recorded message.

Al pushed the “play” button and a familiar voice spoke:

“Hello, this is Miri again from Nefesh B’Nefesh. Good news. Due to several unexpected last-minute cancellations, we have been able to reserve the three ABC seats near the window and the D in the middle. Derech Tze’lei’cha.”

This short story contains real messages for Jews in the US:

1- The family decided to come on aliya, but they missed the opportunity because it took them five years to put their matters in order.

A rule in life as stated in many Halachic sources:

למה לא עשה מצוה כשהיא נמצאת לפניו

When a mitzvah presents itself, do not postpone its fulfillment.

2- With all the dangers facing the democratic West, the main issues concern the US. Their military manpower is far too small for the challenges, so that the question is not whether the military draft will be reinstated, but how soon it will happen? The chances of it happening in an election year are slim, but it will happen and soon.

The tensions in various areas of the world – each alone and exponentially greater together – are increasing. Russia is flexing its might in Europe. China is breathing down the neck of Taiwan. Shiah Iran is just weeks away from their ability to construct a nuclear weapon and their inter-continental ballistic missiles, which are not applicable for Iran's enemies in the Middle East but designed for targets in Europe and further west. And then there's the mad dictator of North Korea. These and more will force Congress to upgrade all the military services.

To this add the necessity to have a very large internal police force, as part of the Department of Homeland Security, to deal with potential mass rioting.

I urge you who feel comfortable in Crown Heights, Boro Park etc., to relate very seriously to how the needs of the US

military will affect you and your family.

Since I know my people and their magnetic attraction to the galut, I can hear some halachic authorities saying, "we are citizens of this country, and it is our halachic duty to defend it".

In my life's experiences after meeting so many people, I conclude, that HaShem allows each person one "mi'shigas" (idiosyncrasy), love of the galut is a very common one.

3- Once a son or daughter is drafted, you will be locked into the US, because children often leave parents, but parents don't leave children.

Many years ago, while still in the States, I recall that between the ages of 14 to 28 one could leave the country only with special permission.

There will be no exemptions for divinity students, and no more one- or two-year learning in a yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael.

To make matters worse, it will be necessary to limit the dollar flow out of the country in order to finance such a large internal and external military.

Between the draft and the limited foreign spending, aliya will become a dead issue for American Jews.

A fresh news item

Germany has announced that it has initiated steps to restore the military draft.

My logic dictates that Germany as a member of NATO could not take such a radical step without discussing it with the other 30 members, including the United States. This will by necessity trigger a reaction whereby all the other NATO

members, including an international marathon with every nation competing to fill their military arsenals.

Shabbat Shalom,
Nachman Kahana

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