

BS”D Behar-Bechukotai 5782

A Lesson from My Time in Jail

Parshat Behar discusses the freeing of slaves in the 50th year of Yoav, and alternatively at any time when money is paid to the owner for the slave’s release. One who has not experienced forced servitude can hardly feel the joy and exhilaration of freedom.

Near the center of Yerushalayim, situated in an area called the Russian Compound, is Police Headquarters. Among its other “interesting” features, the headquarters contains a jail which serves as a holding area for detainees until they are brought to trial.

Whenever I pass the jail, my eyes are instinctively drawn to the window of a certain cell. This cell was my “home” for 30 hours about 40 years ago, when I, and several others, were arrested for demonstrating the unjustified arrest of a citizen of the Old City.

It was an interesting experience. It opened my eyes to a sub-culture that exists in our midst, which one can lose sight of by just blinking.

It was the last day of Pesach. The cell held 12 prisoners, all young Jews. Most were detained for drug related crimes. After settling down and meeting each one, who somehow knew that I was a Rav, I invited them all to sit near me and I began telling them about Pesach. After 15 minutes, I told them to get up and we began to dance in a circle, singing “Mitzva Gedola Le’heyot be’Simcha”. After 10 minutes of this they sat down again, and I continued to teach them. The shiur-dance-

shiur continued until it was time to daven Mincha. Several police officers, who were aware of what was happening and heard my call for "mincha", entered the cell, locked the door behind them and davened with us! After the davening the police left, returning later to daven ma'ariv. After the chag was over my wife brought me tefillin, and the next day the tragic young figures in the cell lined up to don the tefillin.

I mentioned a "window". From the outside it is no more than a small aperture in the wall. From inside the cell, because of the "window's" height, it was impossible to view the outside world; nevertheless, it served as a small but very appreciated entrance of limited fresh air.

The cell was lit by a single light bulb which was never turned off. The light was artificial, but one can get used to anything.

There were inmates who spent much of their lives behind bars. They told me that after a while, one gets an intuitive feeling with regard to who is the cell leader, and a social strata develops. It is a small world with all the trappings of the larger outside free world: light, air, food, work, social interaction, friendships, competitions, hopes and disappointments.

When passing the little window from the outside, I indulge in the natural warmth and light of the sun. The clean fresh air fills my lungs and provides energy to do things. I can go wherever I wish without limitation; the world belongs to me. The exhilaration of escaping an unnatural reality, where I am dependent on the wishes of people who are not in the same mind frame as mine. I am a partner with Hashem in creating a better world. I am not forced to artificially withhold my capacities, beliefs and talents for fear of what my neighbor might think.

I recall the immense joy which came over me when Rav Neventzal, Rav of the Jewish Quarter, signed for my release.

It was almost as intense and boundless as the feelings which gripped me when I emerged from the plane 60 years ago to take my first steps in Eretz Yisrael as a free Jew.

For here the light of Torah is not from an artificial source. The air which permits us to survive is unpolluted kedusha.

Here I can live and practice my halacha and customs without looking over my shoulder.

Here I am free of the bars that shackle a Jew's conduct as a minority in Gentile lands, where the goy decides the mores and life's styles.

Here I can walk on the main street of Yerushalayim and scream out "Shema Yisrael", and 50 others will join with me.

I speak the holy language of the Torah with my little great-grandchildren in the knowledge that they will do so even with their great grandchildren.

I am free to be the person I am – a Jew among Jews from 100 different lands, each with a compelling history that ran counter to logic and empirical history.

I, who have returned home after 2000 years of my family's galut, am living proof that there is a God – and He is a Religious Zionist.

Spiritual War

During these very days, 55 years ago (5728-1967), the Medina was in the midst of a three-week period of preparation for a life-and-death struggle against the Arab-Amalekites surrounding us. The Arab world was sharpening its swords and their diatribes against the Jewish State, eagerly informing

the indifferent and apathetic world what awaited every Jewish man, woman, and child here.

It was a time when HaShem was testing the loyalty of His people. "Do you believe that the Galut has ended?" HaShem asked, "and that I have brought you back to Eretz Yisrael until the end of days, or is your skepticism stronger than your beliefs?"

While families were being separated from their fathers, sons and brothers who were called to report for active duty, other families were lining up at the various airline desks at Ben Gurion Airport to make sure that they would leave before the bombs descended.

Years later, I had the opportunity to befriend an intriguing gentleman whose name was Ezer Weizman, who at the time of the Six Day War served as the Assistant Chief of Staff of Tzahal, and later as President of the State.

At our first meeting, we sat for over three hours while he told me his incredible life story. Among many things, he told me about the life-and-death gamble the Medina had made at the onset of the Six Day War.

Tzahal knew that we had to destroy the air forces of the Arab nations from Egypt to Iraq, which was logically and militarily a "mission impossible". Tzahal had to factor in the distances between the Medina and the enemy air bases, the limited number of attack planes at our disposal, the moment of surprise and our defense system to deal with the enemy's counterattack.

The reality of our situation left two choices: capitulation or fight. The decision was taken to use every available plane to attack, while leaving no planes to defend the country. It was an authentic biblical situation where HaShem leaves no choice but to do His bidding.

People were streaming out of the country, and there was a

bittersweet joke that the last one out should turn off the lights.

HaShem's angels, in the form of our pilots attacked on the morning of June 5. Our planes reached every enemy air base and destroyed their planes on the ground. Israel set a world record in refueling and rearming the planes, as they returned and very quickly were in the air again.

The outcome of the Six Day War had been decided in the first few hours of that Monday morning. As the day went on, our ground troops swept into Shomron and Yehuda. Every newscast was as if the reporter was reading from the Book of Yehoshua. "Our troops have just liberated Yericho. Our troops are entering Beit Lechem. The Tank Corps has just liberated Shechem. Our troops are advancing rapidly in the Sinai Peninsula towards Sharm el-Sheikh.

Then on Wednesday morning at 10 AM, the most significant event of the last 2000 years occurred. The radio announced that the Old City of Yerushalayim had returned to Am Yisrael, and we were now the masters of the Temple Mount and the Kotel.

Thursday and Friday were left to complete the liberation of the Sinai Peninsula and the entire area west of the Jordan River.

On Shabbat our troops did the impossible. They scaled the Golan Heights and in a few hours of fighting decimated the Syrian army and liberated the entire Golan Heights.

This was not a war between soldiers. It was a war between angels and mortal men.

HaShem rolled out the red carpet for the Jewish nation. He invited every Jew in the world to come home and rejoice in His glory and the glory of His people Yisrael.

The gates of Shechem, Yericho, Beit Lechem and Chevron were

open for all of HaShem's children. "Come, take it. It is all yours. Come in your millions, there is room for all," cried out the Voice from heaven.

HaShem is ready to start a new beginning with His nation. All is forgiven. The sins of the fathers have been cleansed for the sake of the children.

Peace in the family has been restored. Eretz Yisrael, Yerushalayim, Har HaBayit, Chevron, city of the Patriarchs, Yericho the "lock" (man'ul) of Eretz Yisrael has been opened. Shechem which had been purchased by Ya'akov – it's all there for the taking.

HaShem for His part was preparing to cleanse the Temple Mount from the Moslem abominations.

The land was prepared to absorb millions of its sons and daughters in the mountain areas of Judea and Binyamin, in Yerushalayim, in the beautiful rolling hills of Shomron, in all the land. The land of Israel was ready to embrace all the Jews in the world. A Medina of 12-13 million Jews living throughout the land, with nary an Arab to be seen, because they would finally understand that the God of Israel has returned His people to their homeland.

The table was set, the aroma of culinary mastery filled the air, the bottles of fabled wine were opened – **but the invited guests did not come.**

Millions of Jews in the galut turned their backs on their loving Father in Heaven and closed their ears to His supplications to come home.

The vast majority of their religious leaders in the galut continued in the tradition of the miraglim (scouts) of biblical times, who led the nation in sharing their beloved wilderness with its snakes and scorpions.

In the tochacha (admonition) in parashat Be'chukotai, after every wave of punishment on the unrepentant nation, HaShem intensifies the next wave of punishments, until the Jewish nation would wake up.

During our prolonged galut sojourn, the hate and snubbing by the goyim and derogatory name-calling of Jews, did not move them towards Eretz Yisrael, so HaShem sent the pogroms. The pogroms did not move the Jews to come home, so He sent the warnings of the early 1930s. They also did little to move the Jewish people, so then came the unspeakable Shoah which brought a large number of Jews home. But there are still millions who do not recognize the hand of God in our contemporary history.

No one can say if there will or won't be another physical Shoah, although we are undergoing a very real spiritual Shoah and losing the war against assimilation. But I do see a horrible punishment for the Jews who do not wake up to HaShem's call to return home, especially for the religious leaders who do nothing to encourage aliya – and quite often even discourage it.

What is that punishment?

As a young boy, I was never physically punished, even when it was justified. My parents were too smart for that.

The method that worked best for me was a surgically sharp rebuke of three words from my father. It happened when I would bring home a less-than-acceptable report card. My father simply would say, "You disappointed me".

The low points in my life were whenever I disappointed my parents.

HaShem expects the Jewish people to act like the chosen of nations that we are – to be one nation under HaShem and the Torah, living in the Biblical Holy Land.

He will not punish the Jews of the galut and their pulpit rabbis, Roshei Yeshivot, Chassidic Rabbes , and authors of musar and hashkafa books; but when each person's time comes, HaShem will say, "You invested your energies and Jewish genius in prolonging the despicable and hated galut. I will permit you entrance into Gan Eden; but just remember during the infinite future – you disappointed Me"!

Remember JLMM – Jewish Lives Mean More!

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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