

BS"D Parshiot BEHAR- BE'CHUKOTAI 5783

The challenges facing our generation

The "Tochacha" (reproach and admonition) in parashat Be'chukotai

Midrash Raba (Noach, chap 34):

אדם אכיל לחם אדם אכיל לחם אדם אכיל לחם - אדם אכיל לחם אדם אכיל לחם

Wretched is the bread whose baker testifies that it is bad.

In Parashat Noach (ibid), HaShem, the Creator of all things and their inherent natures, testifies:

אדם רשע מלידה אדם רשע מלידה אדם רשע מלידה

The nature of man is evil from birth.

Parashat Be'chukotai, which we will read this Shabbat, contains the harsh rebuke and warning (Tochacha) regarding the fate of the Jews if we repudiate our covenant with HaShem by not upholding the Torah.

The list is horrific. We will experience disease, starvation,

military defeat, foreign subjugation, exile and more. These are terrible curses, but there are worse things that we have experienced in our history.

Why does the Tochacha omit the ravages of the Shoah, and what Christianity and Islam will have done to us in the years of our exile?

Why were we not warned about the Germans and their cohorts, who – in their insatiable hunger and unquenchable thirst to annihilate the entire Jewish people – invented and carried out historically unprecedented, apocalyptic, and satanic deeds.

We were dragged from our houses to the train station where they piled us into cattle-cars to be transported for days to unknown destinations without space, air, water, or food. When the trains arrived, the living were forced down with whiplashes and vicious dogs, stripped naked, branded with numbers, led into gas chambers, and then reduced to ashes. Our hair became raw material and our gold teeth sold to rich American financiers. Why were we not threatened that we would be turned into human skeletons to work for the Germans until our souls could not take it anymore? We would be subject to medical experiments by highly trained doctors, then thrown into open pits like refuse that needed to become invisible.

Why are these things not included in the threats regarding what would befall us if we repudiated our covenant with HaShem?

Answer:

Had the Torah spelled out in gory detail what awaits us if we reject the covenant, the naïve Jewish mind would have concluded that these verses are like “crying wolf”, meant only to frighten us with false alarms, because human beings could not possibly descend to such bestial and sadistic depths. So, the naïve Jewish mind would have rejected the entire Tochacha as unrealistic and not serious.

Heart, Soul, and Might

Jewish history is a 3300-year bewildering succession of human events beyond reason and logic.

It involves shattered hopes that turned into salvation. Exile that exhausted our strength, but with perseverance turned into redemption, and mighty despotic rulers opposed by lonely men of faith who breathed hope and uplifted the spirits of the downtrodden. The nation, beloved and chosen by HaShem, whose martyrs at the hands of gentiles number in the many millions, nevertheless changed the world by creating “conscience” which led the gentiles from paganism to recognizing the omnipotent, invisible Creator.

When viewed out of the box, the long arduous journey of Am Yisrael along the circuitous pitfalls of history is the unequivocal proof that there is a purposeful goal-orientated Creator who guarantees the eternal existence of the Jewish nation, even if we fall short of His demands.

Now to the realities of our contemporary lives. How can we know where HaShem is.

I submit:

The Gemara in Sanhedrin 97a:

אמר ר' יוחנן ארבעים ושתים רבבות שנים יתקיים עולמנו
אחדת אלפי שנים יהיה עולם הזה
אחתת אלפי שנים יהיה עולם הבא
אחתת אלפי שנים יהיה עולם הזה

In the yeshiva of Eliyahu it was revealed that this world will exist for 6000 years, divided into three groups of 2000.

The first 2000 will be a period of “tohu” (desolation, waste,

emptiness, worthlessness) when cultures were being developed along the lines of the most debase instincts of man. Paganism and idolatry will capture the minds and hearts of humanity.

The second 2000 years will be centered around HaShem's revelation to His chosen nation, and from us to the far corners of humanity.

The last 2000 years, of which we are a part, is the period of violent preparation for the Mashiach and his ultimate appearance.

The Jewish nation, beginning with our forefathers and mothers 'til this day, lived and are living through all three periods, each in a magnificent fashion weave together miracles and human effort.

The second sentence of Kriy'at Shema reads:

יְהוָה יְהוָה יְהוָה יְהוָה יְהוָה יְהוָה יְהוָה-יְהוָה 'וּבְכָל לִבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ וּבְכָל מְעֹדְךָ

*And you shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your **soul** and with all your **might**.*

I submit that "with all your **heart** and with all your **soul** and with all your **might**" pertain to three different phases of Jewish history:

1- There are choices in life which are determined by one's subjective evaluation of the facts and the alternatives at hand, and other choices which are immediate and reflexive, stemming from the deepest recesses of one's soul. A man can meet 100 women in his quest for a wife and feel nothing; then he meets "the one" and becomes engulfed with the feeling that he has found his soulmate. This applies, as well, to an

ideology or great moral issue where many people remain unmoved, but one particular individual feels an inner compulsion to become involved.

2- After the initial meeting between man and his woman or man and his ideology, there is a desire that the relationship develop and advance. He sends her flowers or devotes time and energy to the ideology of his initial attraction. If the relationship stagnates with no apparent progress, he might choose to leave the object of his attention or perhaps continue in the hope that eventually there will be mutuality.

3- If he continues, this unrequited relationship might cause him great anguish. The woman of his life can be cruel and heartless, or the moral ideal to which he has dedicated his life could cause him to be harshly punished. At this point one can choose to leave the relationship or to continue despite the hurt and anguish.

The Midrash relates (Otzar Ha'Midrashim, Eisenstein; Pesikta 884) that prior to presenting the Torah to the Jewish people, HaShem offered the Torah to the 70 basic races. The children of Esav refused when they became aware of the prohibition of murder, as did the children of Yishmael because of the prohibition against dishonesty, and all the other races for their particular reasons. But when offered the Torah, our ancestors, even before learning the Torah's demands, replied spontaneously and unanimously na'aseh ve'nishma – "we shall do and we shall understand."

To return to the second sentence of Kriy'at Shema:

וְאָתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֶחָד

*And you shall love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your **soul** and with all your **might**.*

The intent of the first phrase, “with all your **heart**” is the compelling need to have God in one’s life, which expressed itself with the spontaneous and unanimous acceptance of Hashem’s Torah – na’aseh ve’nishma – “we shall do and we shall understand.”

For over 2500 years we have been serving HaShem in unparalleled loyalty with no explicit reciprocity as existed at the time of the prophets. We desire that our relationship with our Father in Heaven develop in mutuality; but there is silence at the other end. We feel that the relationship is not developing; nevertheless, we continue to loyally worship HaShem in total love and faith. This is the intent of the second phrase, “with all your **life**.”

Despite our total submission to God, our relationship has caused us untold anguish and pain throughout the two millennia of galut, leading to the unspeakable Shoah. Yet we continue without weakening our resolve to cling to HaShem at all costs. This is the intent of the third phrase, “with all your **might**.”

Now it all comes together.

The initial 2000 years of creation saw humanity develop in atheistic narratives or pagan theologies. Towards the end of this period, Avram from Aram (Iraq) entered upon the world’s stage to reveal the existence of an intelligent single Creator of all that exists. His teachings were accepted by many to the point that Hashem saw him worthy of being called Avraham, the spiritual father of many nations. This was the period of “with all your **heart**,” as stated in the Kriy’at Shema.

In the second 2000 years, HaShem appears more open towards humanity when he revealed His Torah and performed unprecedented miracles for Am Yisrael. It is the period of the two Batei Mikdash when our relationship with the Almighty became more tangible, as HaShem “dwells” in the Temples of

Yerushalayim. This is the second period “with all your **soul**” in Kriy’at Shema.

The 2000 years following the destruction of the second Bet Hamikdash and our exile, and subsequent uprooting to galut is one of great dedication to HaShem, accompanied by the suffering that our faithfulness brings upon us. This is the third phrase “with all your **might**” in Kriy’at Shema.

In conclusion:

The challenges facing our generation are the return to Eretz Yisrael and continuing from the point in history when our independence was terminated by the now non-existent Roman empire.

Jewish life in the last 2000 years in galut, including contemporary communities, has been the struggle for physical and religious survival. In contrast, our lives in Eretz Yisrael are guaranteed by HaShem’s promise demonstrated through daily miracles.

Our efforts as a society are committed not merely to survival but to “flourishing” in every way. We here are preparing the way for the physical exodus from foreign lands, and spiritual exodus from foreign cultures and beliefs. In human terms, a metamorphosis cannot occur in one or two generations. The rust and crust have to be removed in phases in order to bring out the inherent spiritual and physical characteristics which were dominant in the students and soldiers of David Hamelech and will soon shine again in our children.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

Copyright © 5783/2023 Nachman Kahana

For more please visit: <http://NachmanKahana.com>

Rabbi Nachman Kahana is a Torah scholar, author, teacher and lecturer, Founder and Director of the Center for Kohanim, Co-founder of the Temple Institute, Co-founder of Atara Leyoshna – Ateret Kohanim, was rabbi of Chazon Yechezkel Synagogue – Young Israel of the Old City of Jerusalem for 32 years, and is the author of the 15-volume “Mei Menuchot” series on Tosefot, and 3-volume “With All Your Might: The Torah of Eretz Yisrael in the Weekly Parashah” (2009-2011), and “Reflections from Yerushalayim: Thoughts on the Torah, the Land and the Nation of Israel” (2019) as well as weekly parasha commentary available where he blogs at <http://NachmanKahana.com>