

B'shalach-Tu BiShvat 5777

BS"D Parashat B'shalach-Tu BiShvat 5777

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Planting Trees and Preparing for War

The Midrash on Vayikra 25:5 draws an allegory from the inherent instincts of a hen that incubates its eggs until the chicks hatch. She protects and feeds them by pecking the ground for their food, but when their beaks are sturdy enough to peck, the mother hen rejects them with the message that they are mature enough to fend for themselves.

[illegible]

So too did HaShem relate to Am Yisrael in the early stages of our being His chosen nation. In the desert, He provided us with Manna, with water, and with a cloud cover to protect from the desert heat and the freezing nights. However, once the nation drew close to Eretz Yisrael, Moshe informed them that HaShem was ending His “maternal” guardianship and going forward the people would have to fend for themselves. They would have to plow, plant and reap and all the other activities that human beings must do in order to survive and thrive in Eretz Yisrael, as the pasuk (Vayikra 19,23) states:

וְכִשְׁבַּעְתֶּם אֶת-אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנָטַעְתֶּם כָּל-עֵץ פֵּרוֹת

And when you come to the land (Eretz Yisrael) you shall plant all kinds of fruit trees

HaShem wants the Jewish nation to be in His holy land; to love the land and treat it as an object of kedusha (sanctity).

Chamushim

The parasha begins:

וְכִשְׁבַּעְתֶּם אֶת-אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנָטַעְתֶּם כָּל-עֵץ פֵּרוֹת (וְ) :וְכִשְׁבַּעְתֶּם אֶת-אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנָטַעְתֶּם כָּל-עֵץ פֵּרוֹת

וְכִשְׁבַּעְתֶּם אֶת-אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנָטַעְתֶּם כָּל-עֵץ פֵּרוֹת (וְ) :וְכִשְׁבַּעְתֶּם אֶת-אֶרֶץ

17 When Pharaoh sent the (Jewish) nation out, HaShem did not lead them on the road through Philistine land, though it was a shorter route, for HaShem said that they (the Jews) would return to Egypt when faced with the necessity to wage war.

18 So HaShem led the people by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt CHAMUSHIM.

Rashi records two explanations for the word CHAMUSHIM whose three-letter root (shoresh) is CH-M-Sh, which refers to the number five.

One opinion states that the verse is informing us that only one fifth (20%) of the nation agreed to follow Moshe into the forbidding desert. The other opinion is that the men who left Egypt were fully armed with military ordnance (today one can fire a gun with one finger, in those times one needed five fingers in order to hold a sword or spear).

I suggest that there is no disagreement between the opinions. Moshe explained to the newly emancipated Jewish nation that they must be armed because they would be facing brutal, cruel, enemy nations on their way to freedom in the holy land. Only twenty percent (600,000 men between the ages of 20 and 60) were willing to battle for their independence and for the future of Am Yisrael in a hostile gentile world. The other 80% chose the path of least resistance and eventually died in Egypt.

Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident in our history, when Jews refused to take up arms in a struggle for survival; preferring instead to abdicate all their ideals by surrendering to the path of least resistance.

In the aftermath of the miraculous victory by the tribes of Zevulun and Naftali, led by the prophetess Devorah and Baruch ben Avinoam over Yavin King of Chazor with his 900 iron chariots, Devorah chastises the town of Maroz for not participating in the battle (Shoftim 5,23).

In the civil war between the tribe of Binyamin and all the other tribes, the city of Yavesh Gilad refused to participate and was severely punished.

Unfortunately, we are experiencing a similar phenomenon in our time; but today it is more severe because the Jews in the galut are AWOL (when a soldier is Absent Without Leave) empowered by a mehadrin min hamehadrin hechsher of rabbinic approval.

In our time the battle to strengthen the Medina and flourish here overlaps the security situation. The challenges in Eretz Yisrael cover every walk of life: education, medicine, all fields of science including astrophysics, economics, social integration of olim, energy, etc.

I would not like to even imagine what the prophetess Devorah would say about the religious leaders in today's galut.

War Games

The Zohar, at the end of Parshat Va'eira (Shemot) states that Yishmael (Ishmael is a broad term for people who follow Islam) will cause three wars: one on the sea, one on land and the third in the area of Yerushalayim.

It is no secret that tensions are rising in the Persian Gulf. Iranian naval boats make dangerous maneuvers around US warships, including an episode in which the Americans fired warning shots from a 50-caliber deck gun to prevent a collision.

It is clear that the confrontations near the Strait of Hormuz on and in the northern Gulf are deliberate efforts to send a hostile message about American naval activity.

These episodes underscore the risk of an armed clash between Iran and the United States in an area that has been a perennial source of tension between the two countries.

The Zohar states that Yishmael will be defeated by the combined armies of Esav (Esau), who by our tradition are the European peoples (including the United States), who in turn will be attacked by a nation from the end of the world (perhaps China). And at the end of days, the Jewish nation will be victorious over all our enemies, and the Holy Land will remain forever in our possession.

In light of current events, I would not issue a life-insurance policy to any Jewish community in the galut. HaShem has provided them with a 70 to 80-year window of opportunity to return home. So, from now on, what happens to the Jews of the galut is totally their own responsibility. We in Eretz Yisrael will be like Noach in the ark. We will witness difficult days and dangers will abound, but HaShem will bless His people in His holy land.

Shabbat Shalom,

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