

Devarim 5780

BS"D Parashat DEVARIM – SHABBAT CHAZON 5780

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The Making of a Rasha

A. The book of Devarim opens on the first day of the month of Shevat, with Moshe Rabbeinu standing before the nation to begin his 37-day farewell speech. The last speech would be on the seventh of Adar – the day for Moshe to ascend Mount Nevo where his holy soul would depart from this world.

Moshe begins by alluding to our Hall of Infamous Events and Characters, beginning with our exodus from Egypt (Devarim 1:1):

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These are the words Moshe spoke to all Israel in the desert east of the Jordan, in the Arava opposite Suf, between Paran and Tofel, Lavan, and Chazerot and Dizahav

Rashi comments that Moshe only alluded to the nation's sins, refraining from specifically citing them in deference to the nation's elevated status as Hashem's chosen people. As he was speaking, it became painfully clear that Moshe was referring

to their regrettable conduct at Bet Pe'or, including ingratitude for the Manna and water spring, and their repeated pleas to return to Egypt.

Moshe's intention was not to castigate the people for past sins, but to emphasize that despite their betrayals and transgressions HaShem still loved them. The proof was that HaShem repeatedly accepted their petitions for teshuva and forgiveness, and that they were now standing on the banks of the Jordan River waiting for the signal to liberate the Holy Land.

B. The Jewish Hall of Infamous Events and Characters contains villains like Nimrod of Mesopotamia who cast Avraham Avienu into a fiery furnace; Avimelech the Philistine king at the time of Yitzchak Avienu, Lavan who did everything he could to make Ya'akov Avienu's life miserable, and the Egyptian king who enslaved our fathers. The list goes on to include the arch anti-Semites of each generation: Nevuchadnezer, the destroyer of the first Holy Temple; Haman and Achashverosh, the evil players in our Purim shpiel; Antiochus of the Chanuka episode; and the Roman general Titus, destroyer of the second Holy Temple. The list includes popes, cardinals, archbishops, bishops, local Spanish, Ukrainian and Polish priests, caliphs, kings, knights, emperors, czars, presidents, chancellors, chairmen of the party, sheikhs and just plain folks who continue to murder Jews for the fun of it.

We know what these people did to our brothers and sisters, but rarely have we been able to gain insight into the step-by-step transformation of a seemingly decent gentile society as it descends down the slippery slope of no-return, into hell.

Not until today, when we are witnessing the metamorphosis of intelligent, progressive, and socially conscious nations slide into Judenhass (Jew hatred).

In the United States, anti-Jewish ideas are publicly and brazenly articulated. Judenhass activities are commonplace in many of the most prestigious campuses, where renowned professors brainwash their students into believing that all the world's ills stem from the synagogues and yeshivot.

In front of our eyes, and without a grain of shame, the ever-dormant anti-Jewish feelings are surfacing, in the workplace, the media, schools, and in national and state legislatures. And as the spittle from the goyim is dribbling down on the Jew's faces, their spiritual and communal leaders claim that it is only rain drops.

HaShem grades humanity to the degree that their lives conform with the purpose for which He created the world. HaShem is compassionate. So, too, must humanity be compassionate. Hashem is just. So too must societies strive for justice. HaShem chose the Jewish nation as His own. So, humanity is graded on the manner in which they honor and respect the Jewish people.

One could argue that HaShem cannot expect people of different races and religions to carry the Jewish people on their shoulders when the Jews themselves behave inappropriately for a Torah-centered people. The argument is valid. But it cannot justify the more than 3000 years of ongoing systematic attempts by goyim to eradicate the Jewish nation. It cannot justify the united effort of the "enlightened" world to condemn every attempt by the State of Israel to defend its right to life, liberty.

It cannot justify the UN's dictates to the Jewish people to refrain from living normal lives in our homeland.

Two days ago, it was "no new settlements in Yehuda and the Shomron". Yesterday, it was "no building of any kind in the settlements of Yehuda and Shomron". Today, it is "no more building in the municipal area of Yerushalayim". And tomorrow it will be "pack your belongings and don't forget to turn off

the lights when you leave Ben Gurion Airport”.

In the last century, we witnessed the dramatic making of a rasha (wicked person), when Hitler emerged from being a nondescript corporal in the German army to the man who orchestrated the death of six million of our people in the Second World War. Today, we are witnessing the transformation of other nations into the roles of prosecutor, witness, and judge of the Jewish people as they strive to delegitimize the State of Israel.

The State of Israel is confronted by tangible threats – the nuclear one posed by Iran, and the missile threat posed by Hamas and Hezbollah. However, a no less worrying threat is that of international delegitimization, as a political, economic and philosophic campaign to reverse the right of the State of Israel to exist and to deny the right of the Jewish people to self-determination in our homeland.

Its ultimate goal is the liquidation of Israel as a Jewish state, by claiming that Israel not only has no right to defend itself, but it has no right to survive. They seek to cause Israel's collapse by undermining the moral legitimacy of Israel, constraining its military activities, destroying Israel's image, and isolating it as a pariah state.

It has taken root everywhere in the Western world and particularly on educational campuses, where pro-Israel speakers' right of free speech is violated by hecklers and by those who threaten violence. Today Jews in major cities such as London, New York, Paris, and Los Angeles have to consider if it is safe for them to leave their homes. There is an uneasy feeling that things are not as they used to be, and that the sweetness of life is quickly turning bitter.

C. Coronavirus

There have always been localized plagues, but never since the time of Noach has there been a worldwide scourge of terror as we are now experiencing. I believe that it is a punishment for the world's Judenbass – be it overt or subtly hidden by nations who are not defending the rights of their Jewish citizens and of the State of Israel.

Coronavirus is a punishment from HaShem which will continue to reap its human harvest until the gentile nations – as predicted by our prophets – bring God into their lives and realize the special status of the Jewish nation and of the Holy City of Yerushalayim. The Gemara in Bava Kama 60a states that we in Israel will also be affected when the heavenly punishment goes into force, impacting both the rasha and his righteous Jewish neighbor alike.

D. Despite the insanity which is now overtaking the world, we in Eretz Yisrael will continue to build our homes, our shuls and our schools.

I recall visiting with our eldest son, Efrayim, at the construction site of the Waldorf Astoria (Israel's most luxurious hotel) in Yerushalayim. As the project manager, his worktable was piled high with architectural and engineering plans. In the background, I could hear the cacophonous sounds of the huge cranes and bulldozers ascending from the bowels of the construction site. In addition to all the nachat I felt as a father, there was another dimension to the whole scene.

The chief construction engineer was a kohen, the contractor a kohen, and my son the project manager, a kohen.

While I was sitting quietly going over my personal thoughts, Efrayim turned to me and said (in Ivrit, of course), "Abba, I know what you are thinking. All the years of building big projects in Eretz Yisrael were meant for us to gain the professional skills and experience to build the Bet

HaMikdash". (Rambam, based on the Gemara, lists the halachic preference of artisans for constructing the Bet HaMikdash and kohanim are at the top of the list).

If you are asked who will put the finishing touches on humanity's history books, your answer will be the Jewish people who have returned to the land of our forefathers. And when Moshe Rabbeinu returns to life, he will be proud to see that the slaves he took out of Egypt have turned his teachings into a way of life unmatched in mesirut nefesh (self-sacrifice) and loyalty to HaShem.

On a lighter note right before the heavier nine days... A tzaddik once prayed on the eve of Chodesh Menachem Av, "Father in Heaven, You have chosen the Jewish nation for the past 3300 years. Perhaps You could choose the goyim for a few years and let them have a taste of a Tisha B'Av and a few pogroms, and then come back to us?"

It might be happening now.

In closing, remember:

B careful **B** healthy **B** HERE

and

JLMM – Jewish Lives Matter More

Shabbat Shalom, Chodesh Tov,

Nachman Kahana

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