

Ki Tavo 5772

BS"D Parashat Ki Tavo 5772

Our parasha begins:

When you have entered the land the Lord your God gives you as a legacy and inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it

Or Hachaim explains:

The term Vehaya (which opens the parasha) refers to a joyful event, meaning that there is joy only when living in the Land of Eretz Yisrael.

But this is problematic in light of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai's statement in Berachot 5a:

Three good gifts were presented by God to the Jewish people and each was given only through great trials and tribulations: Torah study, Eretz Yisrael and the world-to-come.

Now, if Eretz Yisrael demands great sacrifice and anguish, how could the Or Chaim state that "there is joy only when living in the Land of Eretz Yisrael"?

I will return to this later, B"H.

Our parasha contains a simple, straightforward declaration by HaShem: When we abide by the Torah, even the rewards in this world will be abundant; but if we stray from the Torah, punishment will be relentlessly harsh.

The punishments are set down one-by-one. They, and many which are not recorded in the parasha, have all come to pass in our

long and unhappy history.

It would appear from the immediate sequence of the verses that HaShem is peering at all our actions through a high-definition magnifying glass, just waiting for one false step to set the machinery of retribution into motion.

However, nothing is further from the truth.

HaShem, our King and Father, is “El rachum ve’chanun” – a God of mercy and compassion. His patience with the sinner is long and understanding. HaShem does not want the sinner to die, but – as we see from our history – He waits for him to return to the godly path of the Torah.

King Solomon completed the Holy Temple 480 years after the exodus from Egypt.

The nation glowed in religious enthusiasm, ardor, and ecstasy. Even the Creator was so “ecstatic” now that the two worlds He had created would be able to function as one that He permitted the Jewish people to feast on Yom Kippur.

However, from that pinnacle of religious fervor began the Jewish people’s descent into idolatry. There were even kings of the House of David who introduced and enforced idolatry by the sword, and even turned the Holy Temple into its service. Idolatry brought in its wake a lifestyle diametrically opposed to the Torah, including cruelty on the part of the elite towards the common man, callous injustice by the courts, and self-indulgence and desire for material benefits at all costs.

HaShem sent prophets to warn the evildoers concerning the personal and national implications of their actions, but to no avail. The course towards destruction and exile was set; the writing was clearly on the wall.

The horrors predicted by the prophets came about in the time of King Tzidkiyahu, in the year 3338 (587 B.C.E.) when

Nevuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, destroyed the Temple and began the 70 years of the Babylonian exile.

The continuous descent into the abyss of sin from the time of Solomon's Temple to Tzidkiyahu's downfall took 410 years. This was the measure of HaShem's patience with His children. It took 410 years of Jewish iniquity before HaShem's Quality of Justice (midat hadin) overcame His Quality of Mercy (midat harachamim), bringing about the end of the first Temple and exile.

Seventy years later, the relatively small number of 42,000 Jews returned with Ezra and Nechemia to rebuild the second Temple. Once again, the nation descended from the religious fervor at the time of Ezra into patterns of life which did not conform to the Torah. Although this period in our history gave rise to the advent of the Tannaic generations and the Maccabeim victories over the Greeks, the civil wars and fraternal hatred brought about the end of the second Temple. Here too, it took 420 years for HaShem to gather His anger and send the Romans to destroy the Temple and exile His children to the four corners of the globe – this time for 2000 years!

Both Temple periods shared a common vector – a steady descent from a high religious fervor to unbridled iniquitous conduct.

Now, as the 2000-year exile comes to a close with the establishment of Medinat Yisrael populated by six million Jews, we are witnessing an unparalleled phenomenon in our historical vector – our modern-day society has been far from the Torah but is ascending in giant strides closer to HaShem.

For the most part, the people who reestablished the Medina were far from leading a Torah life. Instead of a return to the Holy Land led by great Torah scholars, the Jews who returned home were filled with ideologies gleaned from non-Jewish sources and openly negated the holy Torah's way of life.

To illustrate what the situation was at the time of the

Medina's inception:

A friend of mine was a talmid (student) in the only yeshiva in Tel Aviv in the 1940s. There were 15 young men like him and 20 older men. There was one yeshiva in Petach Tikva, with only two or three others in Yerushalayim. The feeling at the time was that Torah study in Eretz Yisrael was ending and would not reappear until the time of the Mashiach.

Today, 64 years later, the land is blessed with thousands of batai kneset and yeshivot dotting the map from the northern border of the Golan Heights to the southern tip of Eilat . The number of people of all ages, who are involved in Torah study and in the implementation of Torah in all walks of life, is unprecedented in Jewish life.

The vector has diametrically turned from what it was at the time of King Solomon and Ezra the Scribe. Today, no one can deny the growing influence of Torah and Halacha in all walks of life in Eretz Yisrael.

On Sunday of this week, we were invited to the "swearing-in" ceremony of our grandson, Avraham Kahana, into the ranks of the Nachal Hachareidi (an infantry battalion established for young men of the chareidi sector but whose majority is currently made up of kippot-serugot young men). The requests to join the battalion are so overwhelming that plans are being made to enlarge the unit into a full brigade.

What sets the battalion apart is that there are no women soldiers on the base, the food is mehadrin, more time is allowed for davening (prayer), and standards of conduct from the soldiers and officers are what is expected of bnei Torah.

This in no way detracts from their efficiency as infantry soldiers. On the contrary, their motivation is among the highest in Tzahal, because they know the place of defending Eretz Yisrael in the hierarchy of Torah values.

The more than 200 soldiers at the ceremony had already served several weeks in basic training. They were brought to Yerushalayim from their training base to take part in the ceremony to affirm their loyalty to Tzahal.

They were sunburned, muscular, many with payot and almost all with visible tzitzit. Notwithstanding the fact that the officers and NCOs are all religious, they don't "cut corners" for the soldiers, and in no way do they compromise the high standards of physical and mental prowess demanded of them. The sergeants and lieutenants are as tough as they come.

Here is one more example of how the Medina is changing for the better.

As grandparents, and as citizens who perceive the Medina as HaShem's venue for bringing the Mashiach, we were proud to see our grandson among these holy troops. The commander, a lieutenant colonel, spoke of the ongoing tradition of Jewish bravery in our unflinching determination to restore the former glory of HaShem and Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael.

The ceremony was highlighted by every soldier receiving his weapon and a copy of the Tanach. It closed with the singing of Hatikva, and the usually melancholy chords of Ani Ma'amin which were transformed by the soldiers into a song of courage and resolve.

The soldiers were then free for one hour to meet with their families, before returning to their training base. It was of particular interest, and even very surprising, to see the evident spirit of simcha (joy) among the families and soldiers. Keeping in mind that many were charedi families, you would assume that they would not be happy about their sons being in the army. Moreover, why would parents, anywhere in the world, exhibit joy at their sons' induction into the military?

To understand this is to understand the seeming contradiction

that was brought at the beginning of this message. How can one be joyous when entering Eretz Yisrael in the knowledge that this mitzva can be fulfilled only through great difficulties and self-sacrifice – even to the point of having to give up one's life?

This contradiction can only be resolved by Jews who willingly enter the sublime covenant between HaShem and our father Avraham, when he was told to leave his past behind in order to lay the cornerstone for the Jewish nation in the Holy Land.

To live in HaShem's chosen land comes with a price. The simcha (joy) is in one's willingness to pay that price by carrying out HaShem's command to bring the sanctity of the Torah to every corner of Eretz Yisrael.

Those who were at the ceremony were able to sense this as if they were standing with the soldiers of David Ha'Melech (King David). The faces, the determination, the challenges.

Indeed, the vector of our return to Eretz Yisrael is tilting upward and will continue in that direction until the entire nation in Eretz Yisrael returns to HaShem.

My wife and I cannot adequately express our gratitude to HaShem for allowing us to have broken the bonds of exile and to come home; for granting us the privilege of bearing children, grandchildren and great grandchildren – all in Eretz Yisrael – and the insight never to leave this land that He presented to us.

The days of anguish and anger as they appear in the parasha are over. There will yet be storm clouds over the horizon, but Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael will face up to all the challenges and not falter or fail.

As in the words of Job 8:7

Your beginning will be humble

but your future will be sublime

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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