

Korach 5777

BS"D Parashat Korach 5777

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Our 55th Aliyah Anniversary

The Gemara (Bava Batra 74a) informs us that the place where Korach and his followers are being held under ground completes a monthly cycle that brings them near the surface, and they cry out:

מוֹשֶׁה אֱמִי וְתוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה אֱמִי וְהֵם שׂוֹרְרִים

Moshe is true and his Torah is true and they (Korach and his followers) are liars.

My life too revolves around a cycle, although a daily one. Every morning upon awakening, I recite "Modeh Ani", and thank HaShem for implanting me and my family in Eretz Yisrael – even after 55 years.

On the 26th of Sivan, Tuesday of this week, my wife and I will celebrate our 55th year since aliyah – 55 incredible years during which we witnessed, and in some way had a part in, the miraculous trek of our nation from galut punishment to Hashem's embrace and call to Am Yisrael to return home.

Our target time for aliya was June 1962. In December 1961, we were on the east side of Manhattan and passed Ochs Trading Co., the supplier of products for people making aliya. I said

to Feiga, "Let's go in and make our purchases". She replied, "You mean it's real?" I answered, "Very real. Here it begins."

Mr. Ochs greeted us warmly. We bought a fridge, stove and other appliances compatible with the electric current of Israel. We gave the date when we wanted the items to arrive at the then-existing port in Tel Aviv.

As we were arranging the delivery, a couple came to the store to pay for their purchases and Mr. Ochs introduced us. He said that they were from Argentina and were leaving that night for the Bror Chail kibbutz in the northern Negev. I told them how much I envied them.

Six months later, on the morning of our departure, I went to Mr. Ochs to make our last payment. While there, a couple came in to make their purchases for Israel. Mr. Ochs told them that I was leaving that night for Israel. They said to me, "How we envy you." I answered, "I know the feeling."

I left the store and the East Side where I had learned for five years in the Rabbi Ya'akov Yosef Yeshiva. I went down into the subway with the joyous feeling that I would most likely never see this place again.

That night, friends and relatives gathered at the airport. The experience was like that expressed by Juliet to Romeo, "Parting is such sweet sorrow." We were sorry to leave family, but that feeling was obscured by the sweetness of a dream come true.

Undoubtedly, leaving one's parents and family is distressing, in fact, departing from family was one of Avraham's tests.

By the time of my aliyah, I had already realized that every Jew is a world unto himself, and HaShem expects each of us to fulfill his personal commitment to the ideals of the Torah and

to Am Yisrael in Hashem's Promised Land.

During the years when I taught at BMT (Bet Midrash LeTorah), students would ask me why rabbis remain in the galut if aliya was imperative to Judaism?

I would reply that human beings are born one by one and that even identical twins emerge one by one.

We live essentially one by one. If your head hurts, your mother or wife can give you an aspirin, but it is your head that hurts. In the normal course of events, we die and are buried one by one, and we present an accounting of our deeds before the Almighty one by one. In the world to come, the religious leaders who are now in voluntary galut will have to justify their actions. However, their rationalizations are not yours.

Before we were married, Feiga and I had agreed that we would live our lives in Eretz Yisrael. It was our hope that eventually our parents and family would join us; but even if not, our decision was set in stone and only HaShem could prevent our aliya.

The PA system called for all passengers on the El Al flight to Tel Aviv to make their way to the aircraft.

We said our farewells and parted from the group as we began walking in the night air towards the "eagle" that would take us out of "Egyptian" bondage to freedom in the Jewish homeland.

Our family and friends stood on the overlook where we could see each other as we ascended the stairs to the plane. My most vivid recollection is of my father waving to us.

The plane was a Boeing 707; three seats on each side separated by an isle; tiny in comparison to today's aircraft.

We had never flown before, so Tehillim were recited very

fervently. The plane taxied slowly towards the runway. The engines roared and the plane gained speed as it lifted off over Long Island. Very quickly we were veering left, northward over the ocean. We landed in Paris and then in Rome. Upon takeoff from Rome, the pilot announced that the next landing would be in Tel Aviv. We flew over the eastern Mediterranean as Cyprus slowly disappeared from sight.

It was another two hours before the shoreline of Tel Aviv appeared. The city was quite small, and the desert could be seen not far to the south.

The plane circled to make its approach from the east. It passed over farmland that today is covered with high-rise buildings. It descended, and we finally felt the wheels firmly on the ground. All the passengers began clapping, as Israeli melodies played in the background. I was told that only on flights to Israel do passengers clap on arrival.

The plane came to a halt, the doors opened and I took my first deep breath of the אֵרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל – the air of Eretz Yisrael – that is said to make one wise.

We disembarked. Walked four steps on the holy land insuring our place in Gan Eden, and fell on our knees to kiss the ground. Never did I feel as tall as in those few moments when I was prone on the earth of Eretz Yisrael.

The following is a short excerpt from my forthcoming autobiography:

It was the 25th of Sivan in the year 5722 (the 24th year of my life). My wife Feiga and I left from two thousand years of exile to return home to Eretz Yisrael.

As I descended the stairs of my parent's apartment in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, New York, on the trip to the

airport to begin the greatest odyssey of our lives, I looked back at what had been my home for over twenty years. My parents, Harav Yechezkel Shraga and Sara Chana Kahana, were the Rav and Rebbetzin of the community. In their home, I was privileged to see the living Torah applied to many communal and personal matters – marriage, divorce, conversion, financial and social disputes.

“How many challenges will we experience and how many dangers will we endure before I see this special home again?” I asked myself.

I entered the car and drove to the end of the street. My jacket, I left it on the porch. Four left turns and in less than two minutes, I was again standing in front of the house. I ran up the stairs and heard a voice deep within me. “Nachman, you long so much for your home. Go back. Medinat Yisrael will get along just fine without you. A Jew returning to Eretz Yisrael does so with pride and gratitude to Hashem for the privilege. He does not look back.”

I ran down the stairs without looking back.

To this day, we have never looked back.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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