

Nitzavim Vayailech 5771

BS"D Parashat Nitzavim Vayailech 5771

Part A:

Our parasha begins (Devarim 29:1-2)

All of you are standing today in the presence of the LORD your God—your leaders and tribal heads, your elders and officials, and all men of Israel, together with your children and your wives, and the converts in your camps, from those who chop your wood and carry your water

While standing at the edge of the ocean, we perceive behind the smashing, relentless waves a seemingly monolithic, indivisible, integrated, homogeneous body of water.

The combined forces of the sun, moon and the rotation of the earth influence the waters to wax and wane, and they execute in perfect unison the order that the Creator imbedded in the "natural law" of gravitational pull.

However, the reality is far different.

Underwater, the ocean is crisscrossed with huge rivers often flowing in different, and often opposite, directions.

The ocean is HaShem's metaphor of what occurs in the human mind. Many of the choices one makes might appear to others and to one's self as well, as straightforward decisions based on facts and experience. But in truth every decision goes through many stages of subconscious thought. The great Harav Reuven Margoliot Ha'yam on the tractate Sanhedrin, explains that a court which is certified to mete out the death sentence consists of 23 judges, because every

major, complex human decision goes through 23 stages of thought.

Within our thought processes, there are, like the ocean, contradictory choices: to be cautious or reckless, be consenting or firm, be cunning or pure, etc. The outcome of these contradictory thoughts are decided upon in accordance with one's moral or religious orientation, as with the ocean where one underwater current subdues the other, resulting in the stronger rising above the weaker, or driving the weaker to change course.

This is being written on the background of uncomfortable current events, as they affect Eretz Yisrael.

I have been witness, more than once, to a remarkable event that is repeated several times a year here. An event that evokes very dramatic thoughts in me – induction day to Tzahal (the Israeli military).

On every induction day, a large (classified) number of young men answer the call to military duty to protect and preserve the people and land of Eretz Yisrael. What is remarkable and even breathtaking is the rivalry of the young men to fill the limited places in the most dangerous units of the army, navy and air force. Here the kipot serugot (knitted kipot) are conspicuous in the competition for these openings, which are never enough to satisfy the demand.

It brings to my mind a perplexing scenario:

– On the one side, I see these young men with the kipot serugot competing for the most dangerous and effective units of Tzahal.

– On the other side I see 600,000 Jewish men from the ages of 20 to 60, cowering in fear from the thought that they would have to liberate Eretz Yisrael from the hands of the Canaanites.

It must have been an awesome sight. Six hundred thousand men who had stood at the foot of Mount Sinai while hearing the voice of HaShem calling out the first two of the Ten Commandments, now refusing to believe that HaShem would help them. They witnessed the ten plagues, experienced the miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea, knew the great Moshe Rabbeinu personally; yet they fled the great mitzva of taking possession of our God-given heritage, as promised to their forefathers.

What do these young men of today's Eretz Yisrael possess that the whole generation that left Egypt did not?

It can be expressed in one word – **courage**.

Courage that overcomes timidity when the moment calls for acts of altruism. Initiative that overcomes indolence when the moment calls for action. Responsibility that overcomes desertion when history calls upon one to act for the Jewish people.

Like the underwater currents of the ocean, moral currents crisscross our subconscious when we stand before critical crossroads of life.

What makes a man like Lieutenant Colonel Ro'i Klein ob"m, throw himself on a hand-grenade in order to save his soldiers, while other Jews fear to even visit the Holy Land?

What makes a young soldier charge into a machine gun nest to destroy the Arabs bent on killing all the Jews in Eretz Yisrael, while other young men his age find excuses to sleep every night between two clean sheets?

What was behind the great and enduring friendship between David and Yehonatan (son of King Shaul) that led Yehonatan to be prepared to relinquish the monarchy in favor of David?

It is expressed in one word – **courage**.

For both were men of great Torah erudition, and also of great personal courage in defense of the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael.

World events are advancing at a dizzying pace. With Israel at the center of the centrifuge, surrounded by many nations, and some "Jewish in name only" people competing for who can scathe the Jewish State more.

The next stage in our history will demand great courage from the people in Eretz Yisrael; courage that is acquired through true faith in the God of Israel. The Creator who promised this land to His chosen people for the purpose of establishing here a perfect society under God's Torah, as prophesied by King David (Tehilim 27):

*The LORD is my light and my salvation **whom shall I fear?***

*The LORD is the stronghold of my life **of whom shall I be afraid?***

When the wicked advance against me to devour my flesh it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall

*Though an army besiege me, **my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident***

The enemies of Israel are many and diverse. They come from Europe, the Americas, Asia, Africa, and all the rest. Many are as white as Norwegians and others as black as Sudanese, with every tint in between them. They are Christians, Moslems, Atheists. But despite their differences, they all share a common hatred of the Jews, even though many have never seen or spoken to a Jew in their lives.

King David had it right again when he wrote in Tehilim 83:

A psalm of Asaph.

O God, do not remain silent; do not turn a deaf ear, do not stand aloof, O God.

See how your enemies growl, how your foes rear their heads.

With cunning they conspire against your people; they plot against those you cherish.

“Come”, they say, “let us destroy them as a nation, so that Israel’s name is remembered no more.”

With one mind they plot together; they form an alliance against you

*the tents of **Edom** and the **Ishmaelites**, of Moab and the **Hagrites**, **Byblos**, **Ammon** and **Amalek**, **Philistia**, with the people of **Tyre**.*

*Even **Assyria** has joined them to reinforce Lot’s descendants.*

Do to them as you did to Midian, as you did to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon,

who perished at Endor and became like dung on the ground..

Make them like tumbleweed, my God, like chaff before the wind.

As fire consumes the forest or a flame sets the mountains ablaze,

so pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your storm.

Cover their faces with shame, LORD, so that they will seek your name.

May they ever be ashamed and dismayed; may they perish in disgrace.

Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD, that you

alone are the Most High over all the earth.

In keeping with the above, I am reprinting a message that I wrote several years ago and is still very relevant:

“We are a nation steeped in the search for truth.

There are billions of people in the world who are satisfied with believing in lies, regardless of how absurd or ludicrous, because it is convenient and because their fathers did so.

If one’s conception of religion is the belief in “the immaculate conception”, so be it. If one believes that Mohammed wrote the Koran (a great trick for someone known to have been illiterate) and that he took a midnight ride to Jerusalem on his faithful steed “Al Burak”, and after tying the beast to the Kotel ascended to heaven, so be it.

Not so the Jewish people. Our classical writings are replete with controversy, quarrel and disagreement, not because we are aggressive and uncompromising, but because we seek the truth.

In the spirit of seeking out the truth, one must be prepared to deal with uncomfortable issues, like the one I now put before you.

In his lifetime, David Ben-Gurion was considered an apikoras (heretic). He did not believe in the God of the Torah, and was better versed in Buddaism than in the Shulchan Aruch. Yet this man, so far from Torah and mitzvot was CORRECT – the time for the redemption of the Jewish nation had begun.

In contrast, the Satmar Rav zt”l, and many who still follow his teachings, are God fearing Jews and scholars. They pray, teach, author Torah books and mekarev (draw near) those who have slipped from the Torah. Yet these people, so steeped in the Torah, were and are still WRONG as they preach that

Medinat Yisrael is... (I won't repeat what they say).

The number 6,000,000 is proof that they are so wrong. This is the number of Jews who were murdered by staying in the galut of enlightened Europe, and the number of Jews in Eretz Yisrael today. How can any rational person dismiss the presence of six million Jews in Eretz Yisrael and claim that the redemption process has not yet begun?!

The difference between Ben-Gurion and the Satmar Rav and his disciples can be reduced to one word which is the subject of a midrash in this week's parsha.

The midrash states that in Ya'akov's dream, the angels who were ascending and descending the ladder to heaven represented the major empires in history. Ya'akov sees these great empires rising to the heights of power and influence, only to eventually descend into oblivion.

At one point Ya'akov hears the voice of HaShem instructing him to ascend the ladder. But Ya'akov hesitates because he fears that if he ascends, then he and his children will also eventually descend into oblivion. HaShem promises Ya'akov that if he ascends the ladder, the Jewish nation will forever remain on top.

Ya'akov is afraid to ascend and remains at the foot of the ladder, and for that reason the midrash concludes we were condemned to the tragic events of Jewish history.

The phrase that best explains the conduct of Ya'akov is "LACK OF COURAGE"; that is, lack of the fierce, uncompromising, irrational dedication and determination to achieve a goal against all odds.

Ya'akov was not yet called "Yisrael", the man who fought and vanquished human and spiritual adversaries. He was still Ya'akov who ran away from the threatening Eisav. Ya'akov was not yet the man to ascend the ladder in search of greatness.

It was the trait of courage that made HaShem choose David ben Yishai to be the king of Israel and the future Mashiach. David who fought the lion and bear in protection of his flock. The same David who went out against the giant Galiat (Goliath) with no more than a slingshot and five stones.

Ben-Gurion was all the negative things I stated above. But he was infused with the God given gift of courage! The United States warned him not to declare a state which would be destroyed by the armies of seven Arab nations. And as a means of showing its displeasure, the USA placed an arms embargo on the nascent Jewish State. But Ben-Gurion was adamant that the time had come for the return of the Jewish nation to our ancient homeland, and he acted with courage.

There were many rabbanim who encouraged the creation of the state, which they believed would survive through the miracles of HaShem. They too were imbued with the courage of David ben Yishai. Religious Jews swelled the ranks of the two underground organizations, the Etzel and Lechi, whose aim was to rid the British from Eretz Yisrael. Dati'im served in the Hagana in every area of the country. The blood of Bar Kochba flowed in their veins.

Don't look for secrets in the position advocated by the Satmar and those who follow his ways to this day. They don't know anything we do not know. The plain reason for their opposition to the State is simply a character trait less than "courageous"; camouflaged over by halachic dialectic which was the life raft of generations of Jews who did not have the self character to take the extra step called "emunah".

Now, if it is disturbing to think that such a great Torah giant can be wrong, turn to the book of Vayikra chapter 4 which discusses the process of "kapara" (forgiveness) if a kohen gadol (high priest) should erroneously permit an act which the Torah rules to be punishable by "karet". If this is insufficient to prove that even great Torah personalities can

err, the chapter discusses the event when the Sanhedrin itself erroneously permitted such a prohibition and a majority of the people acted on their error.

As the days of Chanukah approach, everyone should ask himself; "Had I lived at that time would I have joined in the ranks of the few against the many, of the weak against the powerful?"

Today's challenges are less formidable than having to fight the mighty Greek army. Yet when HaShem provided us with the "ladder of Ya'akov" by giving us control over Shomron, Yehuda, the Golan, and Azza, we did not act with the courage needed to ascend the ladder. The temerity of our political leaders and, in many cases religious leaders, blocked the gate leading to greatness. For this we might, HaShem forbid, have to pay the price which all cowards must pay when faced with their own phobias.

The call of Moshe Rabbeinu, "Mi Lashem Ayei" was heard by many of our ancestors when the call was again heard to join the ranks of the Chashmonaim. And it reverberates today; calling every one strong of heart and with emuna to return to Eretz Yisrael, to complete the process of Jewish redemption that began on the 5th of Iyar 5708".

As Parashat Nitzavim begins, Moshe brings together the entire Jewish people to renew the covenant entered into by HaShem and Avraham Avienu.

At this critical junction in our history as the oceans of hatred toward the people of the Torah swell, we must re-enforce the covenant by standing together against those who seek to destroy our nation.

So I call upon:

1. The chareidie community in Eretz Yisrael to send their

- sons and students to Tzahal for basic training.
2. The Jewish youth in the galut to come home to join Tzahal in defense of the holy land.
 3. All my Jewish brothers and sisters in the galut, to come on aliya, particularly now. For it is moments like these that the God of history records for posterity the brave and audacious who will bring the dreams of generation to fruition.

No action *or inaction* is forgotten. The third chapter of the book of Nechmia records the families who participated in the rebuilding of the walls around Yerushalayim at the time of our return from Babylonian captivity. Verse 5 informs that the wealthy families of Tekoa refused to participate in the work. Their refusal is part of the Bible and will be remembered in infamy for all times.

Part B:

Unknown to many of the people who will be walking home from the Kotel this coming Friday night, the center of Jewish life in Yerushalayim at the beginning of the 1900s was in what is today called the "Moslem Quarter". Here was the seat of the great yeshivot and social and health institutions, as well as home to hundreds of Jewish families who made up the majority of the people living in the Old City.

In the late 1920s early 1930s, the British encouraged and abetted the Arab populous to kill Jews and throw those who survived from their homes, homes which Arabs occupy to this day. Among the victims were many batei kneset which were physically destroyed.

The bet kneset on Al Wad Street 90 fared much better. When the Jews were forced to flee the area, two Arab families squatted in the building, sparing the building from the hatchets and matches of the religion of peace.

in 1982, I was merited with the opportunity to restore the

building to again be a bet kneset. On the last Shabbat before Rosh HaShana, the doors of the new Chazon Yechezkel Bet Kneset were thrown open to begin anew its function as a house of prayer and Torah study.

I named the bet kneset after my father Harav Yechezkel Shraga Kahana zt"l, and in the spirit of the great vision of the prophet Yechezkel, where the dry bones of Israel return to life.

This coming Shabbat we will mark the 29th anniversary of the bet kneset.

To shorten a long story of 29 fascinating years is a difficult feat.

The bet kneset is today home to a vibrant community, a kollel, an up to date library for the hundreds of Jewish children who live in the area, replete with computers as fitting our times. The bet kneset is the center of Jewish life in the northern part of the Old City.

When in Yerushalayim, please come to the bet kneset. But remember to walk head high, as you tread on the ground where our kings and prophets walked thousands of years before.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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