

Nitzavim-Vayelech 5780

BS"D Parshiot Nitzavim-Vayelech 5780

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

The cause and cure of difficult conditions

In the book of Bereishiet, parashat Lech Lecha, Avraham arrives in the holy land in fulfillment of HaShem's directive to leave his birthplace of Ur Kasdim and settle in the future Eretz Yisrael. However, soon after his arrival the land was enveloped with a severe famine which left Avraham little choice but to descend to Egypt to obtain food for the very large entourage of students and converts that he was leading. Our rabbis explain that it was a test to see if Avraham would question HaShem who was contradicting His own command for Avraham to ascend to the holy land and was now creating a situation which he had to leave.

Whether Avraham passed or failed the test is a matter of dispute between the Ramban and other commentaries; but the critical point here is that in order to create the conditions to test Avraham, hundreds of thousands of Canaanites suffered starvation and deprivation. The conclusion is startling; that for the sake of this single tzaddik who would bring forth HaShem's chosen people, untold others had to provide the background and pay the price.

In order to save Lot and his daughters (one of whom would bring forth the nation of Moav, the righteous Ruth, and her

great grandson King David), the population of the five cities of Sodom, Amora, Adma, Tzefuyim and Tzo'ar would have to die.

In Bereishiet 47:21, Yosef orders the entire population of Egypt to resettle in other parts of the land, apparently to impress upon them the implications of their having sold their properties to Paro in return for food. Rashi explains an additional reason; when Yosef's family came to Egypt it was degraded by the locals who called them "golim" (exiles or displaced people), so now Yosef in order to release his family from this degradation, turned all of Egypt into "golim".

And there are many more examples.

Planetary pandemic is a display of HaShem's anger towards humanity

Not since the days of Noach has there been such an all-embracing, inclusive human catastrophe as we are now experiencing with the COVID-19 pandemic. It is planetary, touching the lives of the 9 billion humans in 6 (or 7) continents in one way or another.

At the time of the great deluge HaShem showed such anger towards humanity that none survived, except the family of Noach, as well as a sampling of the animal world, and of course viruses and other microbes.

As it appears now HaShem is angry at humanity, with each nation according to Hashem's reckoning of good vs evil.

Can one say today that HaShem has an accounting with the Jewish nation? But in order to disguise that the "father" is angry with his "sons" the virus was "commanded" to affect

millions of other people? Who knows? But it is food for thought.

We in the holy land are subject to instructions of the Health Ministry, but the resolution of the virus lies not with distancing, masks or isolation, but rather in improving our relationship with the Creator who chose us as His unique nation.

We are being punished in six major areas: our **batei knesset** (synagogues) and **yeshivot**, the economy, the security situation, moral permissiveness, education, and divisiveness.

1- Many **batei knesset** are either closed or limited in the number of people permitted to daven (pray) together. Our **yeshivot** are being affected in a major way, with many students sick with COVID-19 or carrying the virus.

2- The **economy** is being hurt badly. From an unemployment rate below 5% to the present rate exceeding 20%, and from a prediction of economic growth of 5-7% per year, our economy is regressing by big numbers.

3- There are **security threats** in the north and in the western Negev. Balloons using the western ocean winds are carrying explosives to destroy thousands of dunam of agricultural land, and the army does not flex its muscle to stop the degradation to the Medina.

4- **Moral permissiveness**.

5- The **education** system cannot function properly, and many schools may probably close soon.

6- Political discourse has degraded into personal attacks causing a loss of confidence in our leadership and **divisiveness** between people.

What our response to COVID-19 should be

We must correct our faults in each of these areas, and then come before the Almighty to request compassion.

1- **Davening:** The standard duration of the prayers is much too fast for one to seriously concentrate. Most minyanim finish a weekday Shacharit prayer in under half an hour with an additional 7-8 minutes on Monday and Thursday when the Torah is read. The individual praying is forced to keep up with the pace of the chazan and most people leave the bet knesset feeling unsatisfied.

I suggest the following timetable for a minimum weekday Shacharit prayer.

- From “Hodu” to “Yishtabach” 13-15 minutes.
- From Yishtabach to the beginning of Shmoneh Esray 8-10 minutes.
- Shemoneh Esray minimum 7-8 minutes.
- Ashrei and Uvah Letzion 4-5 minutes.

It should go without saying that frivolous and unnecessary talk in the bet knesset is a serious sin and must be stopped.

2- The **economy:** The Achilles heel of our economy is the wide-ranging desecration of Shabbat, from manufacturing to open retail stores and shopping malls.

A successful income is not achieved in a 7-day work week, but rather by ceasing to work on Shabbat.

3- The **security** situation and army: The army is a machine whose purpose is to take away life from our enemies – plain and simple. It is there where you learn how to kill those who would come to kill you. But women as the providers of life

have no place there, as the Torah makes clear. Just as metal may not be used to form the stones necessary for the altar in the Temple because metal is used to take away life in war, while the altar gives life.

I am aware of the vital work that women perform in the military. They are the eyes and ears of the Medina. Women soldiers sit in front of screens for 8-hour shifts staring at an area of land, sea or sky, in search of predators; an activity that men find extremely difficult to do.

The solution is for women to continue performing all the duties, just as they do today, but not as soldiers, instead as salaried civilians in the employment of the military. As far as the active fighting units are concerned there should not be even one woman involved.

4- Our **permissive** attitude towards the sexual perversion of the LGBT people is a blight on Israeli society. Acceptance of what the Torah considers to be an abomination, by allowing LGBT parades and LGBT rights protected by civil law is wrong; this must change.

5- An **Education** system supporting schools where Jewish children graduate without ever having heard “Shema Yisrael” or learning to don Tefillin, is a broken system.

6- **Divisiveness:** HaShem brought forth the Jewish nation based on twelve tribes, each serving HaShem with difference nuances. Today, unfortunately, our society is turning into many more tribes each distinctly different than the other. The Chassidim themselves are fractured into separate cults with many unwilling to marry with a different section. In the political arena Right vs Left, settler vs Peace Now, and the list goes on. One way to bring us together is to experience a common threat like an epidemic, but there must be a better way to feel brotherhood as Jews and make peace despite our differences.

We observant Jews are not exempt from criticism in this area. Just to mention a significant fault: When Yeshivot whose students are exempt from military service refuse to say a prayer for the welfare of our soldiers are defying the spirit of the Torah itself.

And one more very serious violation: people who find fault with others, even if they mean well (including myself).

Therefore, I will close with the following: We have our work cut out for us.

The virus is not going away so quickly. Difficulties in life are Hashem's messages to us to improve our ways. It is our responsibility to decipher these messages and to act upon them with intelligence.

So remember the three Bs: Be careful Be healthy Be here and JLMM Jewish Lives Matter More

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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