

Noach 5781

BS"D Parashat Noach 5781

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Moments of Truth

Bereishiet 9:27

יְהוָה יַעֲרַח יָפֶתְחַ וְיָשְׁבֻּ עַל אֹהֶל שֵׁם וְקָנָאן יִהְיֶה עַבְדּוֹ

God enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be their servant.

Rashi explains:

May God extend Japheth's territory; and the Shechina (HaShem's immanent presence) shall dwell in the midst of Am Yisrael and Canaan will be slaves of Shem

King Shaul, Lot & Yishmael's Moments

The book of Shmuel 1 16:18 relates that Do'eg ha'Edomi (one of King Shaul's officers) sought to arouse the King's jealousy by enumerating David's many attributes, which outnumber even those of Shaul's son Yehonatan, successor to the throne:

nephew.

HaShem then revealed Himself to Avraham to create the “Covenant between the Pieces” –

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַיָּמִינִים

promising him Eretz Yisrael. Avraham told HaShem that there was no point to these blessings without a son to carry on his holy work of disseminating the faith in the One God and with only his servant Eliezer of Damascus to inherit his possessions. HaShem promised Avraham that his heir would be his son born to him by his wife Sarah.

The Torah relates in Bereishiet 15:18, regarding the “Covenant between the Pieces”:

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַיָּמִינִים וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-אַבְרָם
אֲנִי אֵלֹהִים וְאַתָּה אַבְרָם וְאַתָּה אֵלֹהִים וְאַתָּה אַבְרָם

“On that day, HaShem severed a covenant with Avram, saying, ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the Egyptian River as far as the great river, the Euphrates.’”

Question: The expression “God severed [karat] a covenant” indicates that God forged a covenant with Avraham and with his descendants forever. However, the verb “karat” (to sever) implies the annulment and not the forging of a covenant.

I submit:

HaShem set two conditions for establishing an eternal covenant with Avraham and his Jewish descendants: 1) the covenant would be sealed on Mount Sinai at the receiving of the Torah and then applied retroactively to Avraham’s time; 2) the initial process of the covenant would depend on the voluntary retraction and abrogation by anyone who would claim a degree of legitimacy over the Land.

In Avraham’s time, Yishmael and Lot were the only two people

who claimed such legitimacy based on some halachic precepts of inheritance. They would both have to willingly withdraw their claims when faced with the most dramatic moments of truth in their lives.

The first to disqualify himself was Lot. When Avraham vanquished the four kings and liberated Lot and the rest of the people of Sodom, the King of Sodom met with Avraham to express his gratitude and offer a reward, here is when Lot faced his moment of truth. Should he return with Avraham to live a life of Torah and holiness or return to Sodom?

The first time Lot went to Sodom, he did not know the extent of their wickedness. However, after having lived with them, his decision to return to Sodom would be made freely and with full awareness of the spiritual consequences. By choosing to return to Sodom, Lot forfeited his connection to Avraham and to any possible material or spiritual inheritance. Certainly, he would not inherit the Land of Israel.

Sometime later, Yishmael was born and became Avraham's nearest heir. In Parashat Vayera, Yishmael's essence was revealed, when the angel described him as a "wild donkey of a man" (Bereishiet 16:12).

According to the principle laid down by HaShem, Yishmael would also have to voluntarily sever himself from his connection to Avraham.

Following HaShem's command to bring Yitzchak as a burnt offering, Avraham arrived in Jerusalem together with Yitzchak and his "lads" (Bereishiet 22:5), who according to our sages were Yishmael and Eliezer. Avraham turned to these "lads" and said, "Stay here with the donkey, while I and the young man go to that place. We will worship and then return to you."

That was the definitive moment of truth in the life of Yishmael and his descendants. Yishmael could have demanded that, as the firstborn, he and not Yitzchak was the worthy one

to be brought as a burnt offering to HaShem. However, Yishmael remained silent, preferring to stay “with the donkey”. He cut himself and all his descendants off from ever being Avraham’s spiritual and material heir, including abrogating all claims to the Holy Land.

It is now clear why the Torah uses the verb “karat” (to sever) with the connotation of forging a covenant between HaShem and Avraham. The covenant was conditional on anyone having a halachic claim to the Land of Israel retracting and abrogating such a claim. Only then would the way be paved for the Covenant between the Pieces. Separating the pieces of the nine animals symbolized the severing and nullification of the other claims to the Holy Land.

Destiny-changing Moment of Truth

At some point in our lives, HaShem presents us with a custom-made moment of truth – to fulfill our potential or to cling to an easy non-challenging path.

At this time in history, HaShem is presenting our brothers and sisters in the galut with their moment of truth. On the one side is aliya to Medinat Yisrael – returning to the God-given home of the Jewish nation. On the other side is remaining in the galut where the Jew and his family link their future with the gentiles to be partners in their destiny.

In the Aleinu liturgy at the end of every silent prayer, we express our gratitude to the Almighty for determining that our destiny here and in the next world is far different than that of the other nations – whose devotion is to false deities – while we prostrate ourselves before the Master of the Universe.

The ongoing pandemic and all the other factors affecting our lives today are challenging every Jew in the galut with a destiny- changing moment of truth.

Which is the correct path for you?

So, keep in mind two points when choosing your path at your moment of truth:

1- What Noach said regarding the future of his son Shem, “the shechina (HaShem’s immanent presence) shall dwell in the midst of Am Yisrael” on the Temple Mount in Yerushalayim.

2- What Doeg said regarding David ben Yishai, “HaShem is always with him.” HaShem is always with Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael, just as He was with David in the Holy Land.

3- And most importantly, to learn from the unspeakable Shoah and other tragic moments in our history that when goyim are killing goyim, it is no place for a Jew to be. In 1939, when the decree descended from heavens that Germans kill Russians and French kill Austrians and Italians kill Americans, Jews suffered most because they all killed the Jews.

At this very moment, in today’s United States of America – which is light years away from what it was when I left nearly 60 years ago and is now at its eleventh hour – choose to come home. Yesterday it was easy; today it’s a bit more difficult; tomorrow might be impossible!

HaShem grants every one the freedom to choose his or her destiny for good or for...

The difficult even painful moments in life are mostly in the realm of decision making, but after the decision has been taken its implementation is usually less traumatic. How to fit 3 floors of possessions into 4 rooms in Netanya is for

magicians to figure out; but somehow Noach was able to squeeze countless animals onto one floor of 300×50 amot for a year.

So let the following mantra be your guiding light:

JLMM – Jewish Lives Matter Most

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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