

Pinchas 5780

BS"D Parashat Pinchas 5780

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Leadership Paralysis

The situation could only be described as surrealistic, bizarre, inconceivable, and even grotesque. The participants, on both sides of the issue; those who stood for HaShem, for Torah, for Yiddishkeit versus those who turned their backs in denial of all they had mastered over the previous four decades: all behaved and responded inappropriately.

On the wrong side of Torah were 24,000 Jews together with Zimri ben Salu, head of the tribe of Shimon, who permitted themselves to be seduced by the Midianite and Moabite women, as opposed to Moshe, Aharon, Yehoshua, and the Sanhedrin, whose behavior was beneath expectations. The reaction, or rather the absence of reaction of the nation's leaders was bizarre; they were paralyzed by what they saw. They did nothing!

Moshe was probably thinking at the time, *"I, Moshe, son of Amram and Yocheved have failed my God, my nation, my family, my tribe. The forty years of teaching Torah and Yirat shama'yim have been for naught. Now after forty years of Torah study, as we stand on the banks of the Jordan River about to enter the land of our dreams, if 24,000 Jews and the head of a tribe could sink so low then all my efforts to raise these people to be HaShem's chosen nation will be remembered as the failure of Moshe son of Amram and Yocheved"*. Aharon stood

paralyzed by shame. *"I stood with my brother in all the enduring challenges HaShem had set before this nation. Together we believed that we had succeeded in building a sacred nation. For 39 years I and my sons offered up their sacrifices in the Mishkan believing that they were indeed the chosen people, when all the while our influence did not penetrate beyond a thin superficial veneer."* Yehoshua, who was about to receive the mantle of leadership from Moshe, was fraught with fear of the future.

The entire leadership of the nation stood ineffectively in the face of the spiritual bankruptcy of Am Yisrael. While 24,000 Jews sinned no one within the 600 thousand of the entire nation raised a hand to object to their vile acts.

There were all ineffective, passive bystanders; except for a single man out of 600,000 – Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon.

Pinchas approached Moshe and reminded him of a halacha that Moshe himself had taught that a Jew who publicly and callously shows disregard for the Torah by living with a non-Jewish woman is liable for the death penalty without trial. Moshe directs Pinchas to act upon the halacha. Pinchas does not approach Zimri ben Salu, head of the tribe of Shimon, to convince him of the folly of his ways. Pinchas takes a spear and enters the tent where the abomination is taking place and plunges it into the man and woman who so disdain and repudiate the moral codes of the Torah.

Pinchas shocked the leadership out of their apathy, and they began to lead the nation back to sanctity by first ordering the death of the 24,000 who had sinned.

Pinchas was rewarded by HaShem by joining his father, grandfather and uncle in becoming among the first generation of Kohanim.

Thirty years ago, there was one man out of the millions of Jews in America who had the passion and the resolution to

defend the honor of the Jewish people. That man was my brother, the martyred Rav Meir Kahana z"l.

The leadership of American Jewry were timidly sidelined in the face of unabashed anti-Semitism, while Rav Meir organized security groups to protect Jewish lives and property. Meir preached Jewish pride and our status as HaShem's chosen people. Most rabbis refused to let him speak in their shuls—and established organizations, and their leaders went out of their way to denigrate him.

Would Meir be alive today, the daily disasters on university campuses where Jewish students are relegated to the status of third-rate human beings, would not be happening.

The contemporary leaders of U.S. Jewry did not for the most part ever meet Rav Meir Kahana, so their hands are not defiled with abandoning and renouncing him, and in some way guilty of projecting the idea that in his life he was a thorn in the side of the rose garden of American Jewry. Were the leaders of the federations, organizations, and shuls of 30-50 years ago alive, I would suggest that they go to his grave in the Har Hamenuchot cemetery in Yerushalayim and beg for forgiveness.

With every passing day everyone who reads this will better understand what I mean. But above all remember

JLMM: JEWISH LIVES MATTER MORE

**Excerpt from my book REFLECTIONS
FROM YERUSHALAYIM***

NATION, TORAH, LAND

The book of Devarim begins with Moshe Rabbeinu's farewell address to the nation, that began on Rosh Chodesh Shevat and terminated 37 days later with Moshe's demise on the 7th of Adar.

Moshe stood before the nation 40 years after HaShem had commanded him to lead a ragtag assortment of millions of freed slaves, whose only connection was their common ancestry to those who had descended hundreds of years earlier to Egypt from the land of Canaan.

Now, the descendants of those slaves stood before Moshe as HaShem's chosen people. Twelve tribes hallowed by HaShem at Sinai and sanctified by the forty years of Torah study and fulfillment of mitzvot under Moshe's tutelage.

Moshe peered out over the Jewish encampment that extended as far as he could see. In the center stood the holy Mishkan. To the north of the Mishkan were the tribes of Dan, Naftali and Asher; to the south were Re'uven, Shimon and Gad; to the east the tribes of Yehuda, Yissachar and Zevulun; and to the west Efrayim, Menashe and Binyamin.

Immediately surrounding the Mishkan to the north, south and west encamped the families of the tribe of Levi. To the east, near the entrance to the Mishkan, were Moshe, Aharon and their immediate families.

Moshe begins by reviewing their major experiences over the last 40 years. He reminds the nation of the terrible spiritual decline of their parents' generation: from pure belief in HaShem to the depths of rebellion, and says (Devarim 1,27):

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁמַע יְהוָה אֶת קוֹל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיָבִיאוּ אֹתָם אֶל הַיַּרְדֵּן וְיָבִיאוּ אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן אֶל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְיָבִיאוּ אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן אֶל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְיָבִיאוּ אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן אֶל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ

You complained in your tents and said, “HaShem hates us; so he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us”.

The episode of the meraglim (scouts) is degrading enough, but how could they have thought that HaShem “hates” Jews?

Can HaShem who called the Jewish nation “my first born son”, hate his own son? There are many sources that reiterate HaShem’s love for His people, including the blessing we say at the Arvit (evening) prayer: “Blessed are You HaShem who loves his nation Yisrael!”

A man once traversed the land in search of absolute truth. He ventured into a faraway town, and as was his habit, asked if anyone there knew the truth of life? A townsman replied that there is rumor that on the nearby mountain there lives a woman who knows the truth. The man ascended the mountain where he saw the ugliest person he had ever seen. Her age could have easily been 100 or 120. Any beauty which might have been hers was long ago lost, and she was a pitiful sight. He asked her if she is the woman who knows the truth? She replied that she is the personification of truth in the world. The young man stayed with her several months enraptured by her wisdom and revelations in every subject. After several months he informed the woman that he must return to civilization. She understood, and requested a favor of the young man, “tell the world that I am young and beautiful”.

The lesson here is that truth is often ugly, stringent, and biting, so we prefer to relate to it only when it is enshrouded with a cosmetic veneer.

This was the fate of the illustrious Babylonian Amora Raba Bar Bar Chana at his initial meeting with the illustrious Eretz Yisrael Amora Raish Lakish after crossing the Jordan River into Eretz Yisrael, as stated in the Gemara (Yoma 9b):

Resh Lakish was swimming in the Jordan. Rabbah b. Bar Hana came from Babylon and offered him his hand. Resh Lakish refused, saying: "HaShem hates you. For it is written: "If it is a wall, we will build upon her a turret of silver; if it is a door, we will enclose it with boards of cedar" (meaning): Had you (your ancestors who were exiled to Babylon) made themselves like a (permanent) wall by coming to the Land in the days of Ezra, they would have been compared to silver, which no rottenness can affect (the Second Temple would not have been destroyed). However, since they come up like doors (which swing open and close with no permanency) you are like cedarwood, which rottenness prevails over (and the Second Temple was destroyed).

Raish Lakish did not mince words. The ugly truth came out without a politically correct, cosmetic, polite veneer.

There are Jews whom HaShem does not love, to put it mildly.

They are the Jews who steadfastly plan and attempt to execute their perverted schemes to prevent the realization of our destiny as HaShem's chosen people. They attempt to subvert our steadfast belief in HaShem's promise through our prophets that we shall return to Eretz Yisrael, to begin anew of sacred mission of being the master players in HaShem's grand plan for the world. They reside even among us in Eretz Yisrael. They can be found in the batei kneset of Me'ah She'arim and in the cafes of Tel Aviv. The latter call for a State for all its citizens even if it means that the Jews will be a minority, and the former are the diligent prodigy of the Biblical miraglim (scouts).

Moshe was aware that he was a partner with HaShem in forging the most far reaching, ambitious revolution ever devised by the Creator. Every nation has individual greats who rose

through the mundane ranks of society to etch a name for themselves in the annals of that nation. However, HaShem's agenda for the Jewish nation was far different. Moshe Rabbeinu descended from Mount Sinai with the revolutionary message that HaShem intends to create...

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A priestly kingdom and a holy nation

Not a nation that gives rise to an individual luminary once every 200 years, but a nation where all its people – men, women and children alike are righteous, learned and holy.

This unique nation could evolve only in the land that HaShem had designated for this ideal and blessed it with immense dimensions of spirituality not found in any other place of the world.

It had to be HaShem's chosen nation, living according to HaShem's chosen Torah, in the land chosen by HaShem – Eretz Yisrael.

Remember the three Bs

B careful **B** healthy **B** **HERE**

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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Reflections from Yerushalayim and other books that I have authored are available at the Pomorantz Book Store, Rechov

Be'eri 5 (between King George and Shmuel Hanagid streets,
refer to map) in Yerushalayim, by calling 052 317 0647 and
online.