

Shelach 5774

BS"D Parashat Shelach 5774

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Highly Esteemed Leaders – Beyond Reproach?

Tehilim 93,1:

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The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty;

the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength;

indeed, the world is established, firm and secure.

HaShem, the Creator and Master of all that is perceived and notperceived, is described in the TaNaCh as the ultimate King.

History has proven two postulates which are fundamentally one, which emanate from HaShem's absolute kingship: 1- The more influential the ruler, the more flawed his end will be; 2- No mortal ruler will succeed in implementing more than one radical change. The principle being that HaShem will not permit any mortal to attain the status of a deity in the eyes of his fellow man.

HaShem sent Moshe, the first King of Am Yisrael, to free the Jews from Egyptian bondage to enable them to receive the Torah at Mount Sinai. But Moshe was not permitted to bring them into the Promised Land. One revolution, not more!

This is implied in the name Moshe which Batya, Paro's daughter, named the baby whom she drew out from the threatening waters; because in ancient Egyptian "Moshe" means to draw out. But unknown to Batya this baby would in time **draw out** the Jews from Egypt; but would not merit to **bring them into** Eretz Yisrael.

The Torah places the reason for Moshe's inability to bring the Jews home on conduct unbefitting a leader of his stature when he smote the rock instead of speaking to it. But perhaps it was HaShem's will to prevent Moshe from attaining Godly status in the eyes of the nation.

Yehoshua brought the people into the Promised Land, led the army to victory, but did not merit to cleanse the land of the gentile, and his burial and eulogy were far below the honors he deserved. For had he succeeded in doing so, many of the Jews who at the time had fallen under the influence of idolatry might have elevated Yehoshua to a Godly status.

The illustrious King Shaul lost the monarchy in dishonor.

King David's monarchy was marred by the shadow which hung over the marriage of Ruth the Moabite convert to Boaz.

King Shlomo (Solomon) ended his day as a commoner after being dethroned by Ashmadei.

And although the fear of attributing divine qualities to mortals is passé today – unless one is a Christian or a Mormon – the process of diminishing a major leader's prestige continues.

David ben Gurion, the driving force behind the establishment of the State of Israel and its first Prime Minister, ended his years with less honor than he deserved.

Menachem Begin, whose Irgun Tzeva'ie Le'umi drove the British from the Holy Land, spent his last years as a recluse, after

initiating the long line of retreats by Israel when he presented the Egyptians with the Sinai desert.

Arik Sharon disgraced his reputation as one of Israel's best military leaders, when he uprooted thousands of Jews from their homes in Gush Katif. He died in a coma which had lasted for years.

All this for two reasons:

1- Leaders of overwhelming influence intrude into the domain of absolute sovereignty which belongs to HaShem alone.

2- Leaders whose influence is great often cause their followers to abdicate their own God-given privilege to think, to deliberate, to weigh and to decide what is right in the eyes of HaShem and brings dignity to the individual, as stated in Pirkey Avot (2,1):

אמר ר' יהודה בן חנניאל כל אדם חייב לעבוד את ה' בלב
בין לבין ובעל פה

Rabbi (Yehuda haNasi) says: What is the correct path one should take in life? The path which brings honor to him in the eyes of the Creator, and also in the eyes of man

Things have reached such ludicrous proportions that some religious leaders are asked to become involved in those areas of life which each person is responsible for, including consent or rejection of a shiduch (marriage) by looking at a picture of a prospective spouse.

My brother, Rabbi Meir z"l, told me of an incident in the Boro Park neighborhood of Brooklyn where there were incessant attacks by the local gentiles on the Jews and their property. Meir organized people to patrol the area at night, which effectively reduced the criminal acts.

Several Chassidic rabbis called a mass meeting to reject the

free protection they were getting. One rabbi got up to say, "My grandfather was beaten by the goyim. My father was beaten by the goyim. And if it is my fate to be beaten by them, I will accept my fate." The majority of those assembled were born in the free country of America, but they applauded the insane position of this leader because they believed that he was close to HaShem (infallible?) so the best thing they could do was to stop thinking independently and just accept.

It is leaders like these whose anti-Torah and anti-human nature positions take hold in the hearts of their adherents who have decided not to think for themselves.

In our parsha, ten of the twelve tribal leaders who were sent by Moshe to scout out the Land fit into the two categories of leaders whose days ended in disrepute.

They were highly esteemed leaders, whose reputations, according to Rashi, were beyond reproach.

The nation was enthusiastic at HaShem's directive that the time had arrived to liberate the Holy Land and establish it as the eternal homeland of the Jewish nation. Beginning with the twenty year olds, the men were drafted into military service. Weapons were distributed and training in their use had already been concluded. The countdown had begun.

The meraglim (scouts) took advantage of their reputations to negate HaShem's command to enter Eretz Yisrael. And their followers abdicated their own opinions, beliefs and assessments in favor of their leaders' recommendations, knowing full well that the tribal leaders were in opposition to Moshe.

Rabbinic leaders must envelope themselves with humility in speech, in dress, in the homes in which they live, the cars they drive, the weddings they make for their family, and never never manipulate their followers by saying, "trust me"!

Laziness, Apathy and Passivity vs. Freedom

If one would want to measure the degree of enthusiasm which gripped the Jewish nation on the eve of leaving the desert to enter Eretz Yisrael, one would not have to go further than seeing the faces of the people in Eretz Yisrael on the 5th of Iyar 5708 (May 14, 1948) – Israel's Independence Day. And if that is not sufficient, then look at the unsuppressed joy of the nation on Wednesday of the Six Day War when General Mota Gur announced to his troops, "Har habayit be'yadainu" – the Temple Mount is our hands. An announcement which resonates to this day in the Vatican and Mecca reiterating HaShem's choice of Am Yisrael as His people.

These two historic miracles which could easily be compared favorably to most of the miracles in the Tanach – to return home after 2000 years of exile, and be sovereign over Yerushalayim – these expressions of Hashem's love for the Jewish nation should have been the springboard for every religiously sensitive Jew to come home.

And the question must be asked: Who jumped into the bathtub of enthusiasm to cool off its boiling waters?

It is laziness, apathy and passivity coupled with the desire for material wealth which have brought the Jews in the galut to abdicate their fundamental privilege and responsibility to think of the glory HaShem has placed on the Jewish nation, preferring to transfer their free will to the decisions of others who willingly manipulate the weaknesses of the many.

The burden of leadership on our rabbinic guides is not to continue in the path of the meraglim; but to encourage all

Jews to come home and participate in the return of the Shechina to Eretz Yisrael. And for the religious leaders in Eretz Yisrael to require their followers to recite Hallel with a bracha on the days when HaShem upgraded His presence in the Land.

There is so much in our religious lives that is good and miraculous, but there is also much which requires “tikun”(correcting).

The first step is for the rank and file of the people to take back their freedom to choose what is essential in Jewish life and what is secondary. We were not born to be spiritual robots who are controlled by the commands of others. Be free like Yehoshua bin Nun and Calev ben Yefuneh, who placed their belief in HaShem even when they were in the minority.

The Immutable Compass

Intellectual independence comes with a price. The onus of free choice is accompanied with the ever present dilemma: “How can I know what HaShem wants from me at this moment? Without the direction of my rebbe or rosh yeshiva how can I know what is the right thing to do?”

There is a formula!

Consult with your rebbe and rosh yeshiva and listen to what he says. Then hold up his advice to an immutable, uncompromising, unyielding standard consisting of a dual ideal – Torah and Eretz Yisrael.

A pesak or opinion which advances a Jew in Torah study and mitzvot coupled with our return to the Promised Land, its defense and development is the way of Yehoshua and Calev. Any other opinion is part and parcel of the meraglim camp.

Torah and Eretz Yisrael are our dual immutable compass. Those who follow the compass will enter the “Promised Land” in this and the next world. Others have a problem.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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