

Shemini 5781

BS"D Parashat Shemini 5781

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The Jewish Nation – HaShem's Instrument

Parashat Shemini closes with the dietary laws, stating specifically those species of animal life which may be eaten; and parashat Tazriah opens with the halachic ramifications (laws) for a woman who has given birth to a child.

Rashi explains that the Torah did this in ascending halachic order of kedusha (sanctity) from the humble animal world to the privileged status of a Jewish person. We will return to this be"H.

In this week's parashat Shemini my attention was drawn to two specific personalities: Aharon HaKohen in the parasha, and Yehoshua bin Nun whose yahrzeit (date of death) falls in this week on the 26th of Nisan. Although the specific crises facing these holy men were vastly different, both were made to bear profound burdens which would have felled lesser men.

Aharon HaKohen had just lost two of his oldest and most competent sons while they were serving in the Mishkan (Tabernacle). Yet he was commanded by HaShem to complete his tasks despite his great personal tragedy.

The Torah describes Aharon's irreconcilable personal trauma in two thunderous words "Va'yiedom Aharon" – and Aharon remained silent.

Yehoshua bin Nun was commanded by HaShem to fulfill an impossible mission: he was to follow Moshe Rabbeinu as the leader of the Jewish people. How does one replace the irreplaceable?

How can Yehoshua direct the elders who are whispering behind his back, "The face of Moshe was like the sun, the face of Yehoshua is like the moon"?

How can Yehoshua assume halachic authority when the Torah is called 'Torat Moshe' (the Torah of Moshe)?

How can he lead the people of Israel into the land so holy that even the illustrious Moshe did not merit to enter? And will the army of Israel do battle with forces many times mightier than they at the command of Yehoshua?

Yehoshua was so discouraged, that twice in chapter one of the Book of Yehoshua, HaShem sees the need to encourage him with the call **יָהֹֽשֻׁעַ אֱמָץ וְאַזְחָק** – be strong and brave of heart.

Where did Aharon and Yehoshua find the inner strength to overcome their great burdens, and complete their tasks?

They transcended their individual, emotional limitations caused by sadness and pain, feelings of inadequacy and mortality, by realizing that they were the instruments of HaShem, and instruments don't weep.

Aharon had to discharge the service that was intended to complete what was only begun during the six days of creation – to connect the metaphysical, spiritual universe with the lowly physical world through the "umbilical cord" of Torah and mitzvot within the holy womb of Eretz Yisrael.

Yehoshua was no longer just the loyal student and attaché of the great leader. His self-image had to change. He was propelled into a role which he never dreamt could occur – to replace the irreplaceable, to advance from being led and to

assume the role of leader. He was no longer the son of Nun; he was now the father of the nation. No longer a pawn in the many pieces of HaShem's nation, but the instrument of HaShem to replace the glorious instrument which had become broken and left behind in a valley near the Mountain of Nevo.

The Instruments of HaShem Today

In Eretz Yisrael, the 27th of Nissan was proclaimed by the government as the national day of remembrance of the victims and the murderers of the Shoah.

At the close of the Second World War, the Jewish people found themselves at the nadir of our history. When the truth of what had befallen our people became apparent, that one third of our nation was murdered, a profound sense of despair and demoralization descended upon our people. Many Jews sought escape from the fact of that they were born Jewish, in shame and embarrassment. "Where was God?", was the question most asked. But the rabbis had no answers. One answer surely is "Where was man?"

HaShem, in His infinite wisdom, caused us to rise above our self-pity and national depression to become instruments in His world plan. The Jewish people were mobilized to do the impossible – to re-create a national home in our ancient land for the millions of Jews who were to turn their backs on the galut [exile] and return home. There was no time for self-pity. There were hundreds of thousands of survivors languishing in the camps of Europe, and anti-Semitism was being unleashed against the Jews in many Arab and Moslem lands. A State had to be carved out from the mountain of rocks and in the barren sands of the Negev. His Royal Majesty's mandate over Palestine was in effect, and the Royal Navy blockaded the coasts in order to prevent the threat of the broken bodies and spirits of Jews who thirsted to feel the

holy land under their feet. Arabs murdered Jews at will in Eretz Yisrael, in the best case with the apathetic indifference of His Majesty's soldiers, and in most cases with their active weapons support and logistical help.

In these circumstances no thinking, breathing, feeling Jew could wallow in the luxury of self-pity. The instruments of HaShem were put to work.

The British were expelled from the land. The Arab marauders were held at bay and the seven Arab armies which invaded the emerging Jewish State were miraculously driven back. Millions of Jews were absorbed into society and the "image of God" was restored to them.

Again, the knowledge that we were the instruments of HaShem allowed the Jews of Eretz Yisrael an achievement of the impossible – to return home after 2000 years of varying degrees of Shoah.

Today, we are again facing challenges which would bring lesser nations to their knees. We are being threatened – almost daily – by Hitler's evil heirs in Teheran, while the world lazily yawns. The Jews in Eretz Yisrael, numbering less six and a half million, are being pitted against a world that echoes the words of Canada's PM Mackenzie King when asked after the Second World War how many Jewish survivors he would let into the country, he responded "None is too many".

On this background, the Jews of Eretz Yisrael will again be called to serve as the instruments of HaShem by rising above our parochial tzarot (problems) in His service.

As stated by Rashi in his commentary on parashat Tazria, the sequence of HaShem's Torah as the blueprint for the world is to deal with the animal elements in nature first, followed by the Halachic laws for the Jewish nation.

So, too, in human affairs. The animalistic drives of men will

have to be dealt with first and only then will the world be ready to receive the holy teachings of the Torah.

There is yet much to be done before the completion of HaShem's plan, which began on the six days of creation. The secret of our strength is the knowledge that we are HaShem's instruments in that completion.

Order of the day – BE HERE and Remember JLMM – Jewish lives matter most.

Shabbat Shalom,

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