

Shemot 5775

BS"D Parashat Shemot 5775

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Today You Have Become a Nation

Shemot 5,1-2:

וַיֵּצֵאוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן מִלִּפְנֵי פַרְעֹה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה (פ)
:אֵלֵינוּ וְנֵצֵא מִן־מִצְרָיִם וְנֵעַבְדְּךָ יְהוָה (פ)

וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה מַה אֲנִי וְעַבְדְּכֶם יֵצְאוּ מִן־מִצְרָיִם וְעַבְדוּ יְהוָה (פ)
:כִּי אֲנִי מִצְרַיִם וְעַבְדֵי יְהוָה אֵינִי יְהוָה (פ)

5:1 Then after Moshe and Aharon went and said to Pharo: "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said: 'Let my people go, so that they may celebrate to me in the wilderness.'"

2 And Pharo said, "Who is the Lord that I should obey him, to permit the Jews to go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go."

The Midrash Raba (Shemot 5) elaborates on the succinct version of the disputation between the kedusha world of Moshe and the pagan world of Paro, as reported in the Torah.

It occurred on the day in the year when Paro would host ambassadors of many nations, who would crown him with honors and lavish him with gifts.

Moshe and Aharon entered without difficulty when Paro thought that they too came as ambassadors of a nation.

Paro: "Who do you represent?"

Moshe: "The Holy One Be He"

When Paro saw that they were not bearing gifts, he asked: "What do you want here"?

Moshe: "Thus has God commanded, 'Let My people go!'"

Paro: "I do not not recognize your God. I will not send the Jews away. But wait. I wish to search in my list of gods the name of your deity." Paro began reading off names of the deities: "The god of Moav, the god of Amon, the god of Zidon, etc. Paro then said to Moshe and Aharon, "I have covered all the deities; yours does not appear, so he does not exist".

Question: The Book of Dieties was compiled by the wisest of Egyptian theologians. So why was the name of HaShem, Creator of heaven and earth, totally absent?

I submit:

At that time, philosophers and "holy men" perceived higher beings as they presented themselves through events of nations. The various nations' ascent to greatness or decline from the platform of history were the consequences and resolutions of the rivalries, struggles, antagonisms, contentions, controversies, encounters and strife of the "god-fathers" of the respective nations.

The god of Israel did not appear in the book of dieties for good reason – Israel was at the time a composite of individuals not yet a nation, and according to the accepted premise of the day the powers of a god were not expressed through the events of individuals.

Four times in the Book of Devarim, Moshe, after leading the Jews for 40 years says in his parting soliloquy to the people, "Today you have become a nation".

It took 40 years for the sons of 12 distinct tribes, who were

subjected to the degradation of servitude, to overcome their proclivity for reclusive individualism and to feel a common bond which is the prerequisite of nationhood.

But, in fact, the ancient Egyptians were correct to a degree, HaShem is not involved in the lives of individual gentiles. However, He is involved “personally” in the life of every Jew. This is known as hashgacha pratit – individual vigilance. As stated in Pirkei Avot 2,1 where we as Jews are instructed exclusively:

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... Reflect on three things and you will not come to sin: Know what is above you – a seeing eye, a hearing ear, and all your deeds are recorded in a book

HaShem is involved in the life of every Jew no matter where. HaShem heard the prayers of Yona from within the bowels of a whale, at the bottom of the sea, and the sounds of an unborn embryo enclosed in his mother’s womb.

However, hashgacha pratit of HaShem towards an individual Jew in the galut or even a community in the galut is a far cry from the “discerning ear” of the Almighty towards the nation of Israel when we are together in Eretz Yisrael.

In the spirit of what our rabbis have taught, that the prayers of a Jew recited privately are accepted less than those of a prayer said in a minyan, the prayers said in Eretz Yisrael are more readily accepted than those said in the tuma of the galut.

The prayers of a Jew in the galut arrives in the shamayim (the heavens) only via Eretz Yisrael. The prayers of the most outspoken anti-Israel rabbinic figure, i.e., the Satmar leader, to the degree that they are heard by HaShem, pass over

the holy land of Eretz Yisrael, no matter who sits in the Prime Minister's chair.

Our parasha states (3,16-17)

וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶל־עֲלֵיזָבֵד וְאֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־אֶלְדֵּרֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֵלֹהֵינוּ (וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶת־עֲלֵיזָבֵד וְאֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־אֶלְדֵּרֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֵלֹהֵינוּ :וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה

וְאֶת־עֲלֵיזָבֵד וְאֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־אֶלְדֵּרֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֵלֹהֵינוּ (וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה אֶת־עֲלֵיזָבֵד וְאֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־אֶלְדֵּרֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֵלֹהֵינוּ

Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.'

In the Torah reading, we leave the time when Judaism was contained in the lives of individuals to prepare for our becoming God's chosen nation, with a common language and history, common ideals and beliefs and common suffering, hopes and aspirations.

The sole stated purpose of our miraculous exodus from Egyptian slavery was to receive the Torah at Mount Sinai in preparation for serving Hashem in His Holy Land. He who chooses today to remain "outside", should not be surprised when tomorrow he will be remanded to "remain outside".

Shabbat Shalom,

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