

Shemot 5778

BS"D Parashat Shemot 5778

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Fulfilling the Torah as a Nation

HaShem appears to Moshe at the "burning bush" with a message of hope and salvation (Shemot 3:7-8):

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֲנִי יְהוָה וְאֵלֶיךָ אֶמְרָא (ו)
:וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל יְהוָה אֵלֹהֵי מִצְרָיִם

וְאֵלֶיךָ אֶמְרָא (ו)
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֲנִי יְהוָה וְאֵלֶיךָ אֶמְרָא (ו)
:וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל יְהוָה אֵלֹהֵי מִצְרָיִם

7) And HaShem said, "I have indeed seen the suffering of my people in Egypt. I have heard them cry out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.

8) So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the present place of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites...

In this initial revelation to Moshe (3,7-8) HaShem refers to the people and to the land. The spiritual Torah factor is

alluded to only in verse 12:

וְהָיָה אִתְּךָ אֵל וְעָמְדָה לְפָנֶיךָ וְהָיָה לְךָ אֵל וְעָמְדָה לְפָנֶיךָ (וְהָיָה)
:אֵל וְעָמְדָה לְפָנֶיךָ וְהָיָה לְךָ אֵל וְעָמְדָה לְפָנֶיךָ וְהָיָה

And HaShem said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain."

Then again in verse 17 HaShem refers to the people and to the land but with no mention of Torah:

וְהָיָה אִתְּךָ אֵל וְעָמְדָה לְפָנֶיךָ וְהָיָה לְךָ אֵל וְעָמְדָה לְפָנֶיךָ (וְהָיָה)
:אֵל וְעָמְדָה לְפָנֶיךָ וְהָיָה לְךָ אֵל וְעָמְדָה לְפָנֶיךָ וְהָיָה

And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the place of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.'

The message HaShem is resonating is obvious: In order for HaShem's holy Torah to be fulfilled in this material world there are two priorities: a people who are spiritually orientated, and a specific land where the Torah will be fulfilled in all its glory, not as individuals but as one nation under HaShem.

The challenges and failures of

Leaders

Misrash Raba, Shemot chapter 5, informs us that Moshe and Aharon, together with the “Zekainim”, the elders of the Jewish people, made their way towards Paro’s palace to present their demands. However, one by one the elders left, each with his cowardly excuse, so that in the end only Moshe and Aharon confronted the evil and dangerous Paro.

The Midrash relates that HaShem exacted punishment on the elders when they ascended Mount Sinai with Moshe and Aharon to receive the Torah. HaShem commanded the elders to descend and stand at the foot of the mountain with the “common” people. They experienced disgrace, embarrassment and degradation for having previously deserted the people they were chosen to lead.

Letters from my critics

Following are extracts from three critical messages which I received in the last few days in response to my weekly articles (I also receive complimentary letters at a ratio of about 100 to 1 in my favor).

Letter #1:

“I read your comment about fake Jews or real Jews with fake beliefs. You lambasted those who had not yet made aliyah as having fake beliefs. May I tell you, please, that this does not help anyone, nor is it toradich. Yes, there are many sincerely observant Jews in galut, particularly in USA, who have not yet made aliyah. Many many who love Israel and would like to but feel that they are unable. For you (and others) to lambast them for not doing so, and for unjustly and wrongly criticizing them for “fake beliefs” is a serious lashon hara. You are certainly not looking for their good

points as we are advised by the great tzadik, Rebbe Nachman m'Breslev ... if you want geulah...and if you want Jews to make aliyah, then honey is more effective than vinegar... Do you want to know what really helps is reaching out to our fellow brothers and sisters with ahavat Yisrael, even ahavat chinam, which is what will build the 3rd temple mamash. Finding their good points, encouraging them in Torah umitzvot and in traveling to visit Israel and hopefully make aliyah. Reaching out to them that way is what will really build the temple within our hearts and then it can be built in Jerusalem B"H."

Letter #2

"In your op-ed two days ago you are condemning so many Jews who still live in galut. You may not be aware of it, but very many of us are very eager to come, and we are nowhere as rich as you seem to think. It is very difficult to make aliyah through the normal process, and even harder for people who are older than 40. We are told that it is almost impossible to find paid work, and we need to bring a small fortune to be able to subsist... Please do not condemn all of us, some people may be reluctant because they have a very comfortable life style in the Western countries, but that is not the situation for all of us."

Letter #3

"Rabbi Kahana,

Please allow me to speak my truth (with enormous respect for your work and you).

I must state for a record, that I fully disagree with your statement in your late article where you suggested that nothing should be done for Jewish in Galut and this (Eretz Yisrael) is only matter of love (not of convincing), as love for a panting.

No. No. No. Why? I am that Jew from Galut. And this is not ONLY a matter of love. But a matter of education. Matter of knowledge. Matter of understanding as well.

By the grace of Hashem you were born into the family who always "knew" about what does it means to be Jewish, about G-d, and about Israel. Consider yourself lucky, fortunate or any way you wish. Privileged???

But in that "silver spoon" upbringing as a Jew...do not forget millions and millions of others...someone like me. Who were brought up in total darkness.

Do you want to know my truth of how I know about Israel?

First time I learned about Judaism was at age 15, when at school boys cut my new coat that my dad just brought from his business trip to Baltic's republics. It was a beautiful red leather coat.

But they not only ruined my coat. They also left a note that said: "Hey Shidovka (Jew) get out from our land. Go home to your Israel".

They knew that my home was in Israel. I did not. They did. Fair? Right? Learning by hate! Well, hate of others can be a very powerful teacher.

I learned about your work and you much later. Your work gave me, to my husband so much support.

That is why I am asking you today to reconsider your statement and corrected it. On behave of Jews like me ...and I believe there are many of us ...you must revise it.

We must keep calling, educating and most of all keep loving them and showing them a way to Home.

You may not understand it fully ...but you are a lighthouse for someone like me. And... The Lighthouse should never stop being

a beacon for those who are lost at the sea!!! Never!

May Hashem has a mercy on all of his children, on all of us. May we all be at Home and at peace with each other. May we all be written on the good (credit) part of the book.

Thank you for listening.”

A personal reply to my critics



Wishing you were here to receive the Kohanic Blessing

Dear friends who have taken the time to express your feelings on the critical issue of aliya and the tone and text of my messages.

Life is not a kindergarten where the teacher strokes the heads of the sweet little kiddies and gives them sweets. Life is a very short and narrow bridge; where a slip could send one hurtling down into the rapids from which return is very improbable. Eighty percent of our forefathers in Egypt chose not to leave and they died. Six hundred thousand men refused to enter the land with the Meraglim and they died. Great numbers of Jews who could have left Europe and come here in the twenties and thirties did not do so, and they died.

I don't live on the moon, nor in a closed cave somewhere in the Judean desert. I am perfectly aware of what is happening in the galut of America, having been born there and gone through the best Torah education that they could have offered.

My wife and I came on aliya in 1962; five years before the Six Day war. Our way was not paved with roses, nor were we welcomed on a red carpet. We came with 1800 dollars, and lived in a third-rate wooden hut in Moshav Nechalim. The hut was hot in summer and freezing in the winter. We entered the hut and saw that grass had grown through the floor so the first day we spent with scissors in hand.

We experienced wars (I served 22 years in the reserves) and difficult economic times, which are a thing of the past in today's modern Israel. No one today will have to experience what we went through. My wife Feige, who was born and grew up on the West Side of Manhattan is one of the most courageous and loyal people I know. Never once in our 55 years in Medinat Yisrael did she ever voice a complaint; but has always been a bulwark of support and strength.

But to be frank, I understand and even empathize with the call for moderation in my messages. The rank and file of Jews in the galut are not the true target of blame. The real blame is a repeat of what we experienced in Egypt; with leaders who fled their responsibilities. Each one retreating to the comforts of their lives rather than joining with Moshe and Aharon in implementing their responsibilities as Jewish leaders.

There is a popular saying that when the owner is angry with his flock of sheep he blinds the lead sheep, which then leads them all over the cliff.

The accordance of Eretz Yisrael to a secondary status by contemporary religious leaders in the galut is the greatest hindrance to the Jewish nation's spiritual advancement since

the time of the Meraglim (spies, scouts). In the best of cases, religious education in the galut presents living in Eretz Yisrael as a mitzva of choice, rather than one which is incumbent upon each Jew.

This one single issue of aliya to Eretz Yisrael and the negative, and in the best case, ambivalent attitude of religious leaders in the galut serves as the lock that denies entrance for countless numbers of Jews to an authentic Torah life.

For many Jews, the message is clear (albeit incorrect). They reason that if the gates to Eretz Yisrael are open, and yet such religious people refuse to enter, it must mean that Judaism is a "pick and choose" religion. God gave us the Holy Land, according to the Bible, so if these holy people prefer to remain in the galut, the conclusion is that the whole Torah is "pick and choose". Hence, one may choose not to abide by Shabbat, or choose not to adhere to the laws of kashrut, or to marry a gentile. Just as long as he remains a good Jew. Reform and Conservative Judaism are super-sensitive to the nuances arising from the Orthodox communities in the galut, where Torah is studied. Chassidic sects pitch their tents where great citadels of learning Torah dot the land.

Another conclusion arises from the Orthodox leadership in the galut. If one presents you with the keys to a brand-new Lexus, but you refuse to enter it, you either reject the giver or reject the gift, and probably both.

HaShem presented the Jewish nation with the majestic gift of Medinat Yisrael. But if you do not reside here, the conclusion is that you reject the Giver or you reject the gift. Both are very bad choices.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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