

the strength to enforce the dictate of their conscience is sorely lacking. They have the “shofet” (judge) but not the “shoter” (the enforcer).

Indeed, life in Eretz Yisrael has always been challenging. Beginning with our parents Avraham and Sarah, carrying over to the time of Yehoshua and his liberation of the land from the Canaanites, to King David, the Maccabim and Bar Kochba, Eretz Yisrael has always demanded sacrifices from those who merit to carry on HaShem’s mission as His chosen people in His chosen land.

It was a huge test even for the unparalleled generation that left Egypt and experienced HaShem’s ongoing presence through His unprecedented miracles during their 40-year trek from Sinai to the promised land, as depicted in the following desert episode.

The closing parasha (Masai) of the book of Bamidbar enumerates the 42 encampments that the Jews experienced in their 40 years in the desert.

Harav Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter (the Gerer Rabbi) in his book Sefat Emet in the section dealing with parashat Masei quotes the Zohar: that the Jews experienced 50 encampments paralleling the 50 degrees of tuma (impurity) they were in when leaving the impure land of Egypt. And at every encampment the Jews extradited themselves from one of the levels of tuma.

Sefat Emet resolves the apparent contradiction between the 42 encampments in the Torah vs the 50 in the Zohar. According to several Talmudic and Midrashic sources, when Aharon passed away, the Amalaikites took advantage of the emotional confusion in the Jewish camp and prepared to strike. The Jews were so alarmed at the prospect of war that they retreated eight encampments back, with the intention of returning to Egypt. The tribe of Levi gave chase to the fleeing Jews and a civil war ensued with many killed from both sides, until the

Levites succeeded in turning the nation back towards the way leading to Eretz Yisrael. Hence, 42 encampments leading towards the promised land and 8 retreating encampments for a total of 50.

Now, if the generation that could almost “touch” HaShem because of his closeness, were so gripped with fear and apprehension in the face of imminent war when approaching Eretz Yisrael, it is understandable that in our times there are even religious Jews in the galut who are fearful of the challenges in the holy land, preferring to live comfortably under the protective shadow of their undemanding spiritual leaders.

However, Judaism has reached its present point, not through comfortable Jews in the galut, but rather by those in Eretz Yisrael willing to lead in trying and demanding circumstances.

A musar story:

It was a particularly cold December morning in a small shtetle in Russia. The winds were howling, the snow was piled up covering half the height of the windows and the last embers in the fireplace were no challenge for the sub-zero temperature and gusts of wind that tore through the cracks in the walls.

At five in the morning, Moshe awoke and was about to throw off the heavy blankets to brave the cruel elements and make his way to the bet kneset. Suddenly, Moshe heard a voice from deep inside his soul. Moshe where are you going? It's freezing outside! Oh, you want to join the minyan to serve HaShem! Don't you realize If you go out now you will be sick for a month and lose all those other davening opportunities? Stay in bed and serve HaShem by caring for your health.

Moshe replied to his yetzer hara (evil inclination) that no one can serve HaShem by staying in bed. A Jew has to do things

:וְלֹא תִטְוֶה צְדָקָה וְלֹא תִשָּׂא פָנִים. וְלֹא תִקַּח שֹׁד וְלֹא תִקַּח רֵשֶׁת. וְלֹא תִשָּׂא פָנִים. וְלֹא תִקַּח שֹׁד. וְלֹא תִקַּח רֵשֶׁת. (ו)

□

19: Do not pervert justice or show partiality. Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the innocent. 20: Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the Lord your God is giving you.

As stated above, each individual should see his or her pure Jewish conscience as a judge to discern between right and wrong, and be conscious of their ability to implement the decisions of their conscience.

However, the Jews in galut willingly accept the bribes handed out by the yetzer hara, and “pervert justice” and “twist the words” of our holy sages regarding the centrality of the holy land to the connection between HaShem and His nation – Yisrael.

On this new month of Elul, let every Jew in galut reflect over his or her involvement in their obligations to HaShem, to Jewish history, and to the future of Am Yisrael.

There is only one thing difficult about coming on Aliya, and that is the moment of decision. Because once the decision is made HaShem helps in its implementation, as can be testified by so many people who have already taken the high road in Judaism.

Shabbat Shalom & Chodesh Tov,

Nachman Kahana

Copyright © 5776/2016 Nachman Kahana