

Toldot 5782

BS"D Parashat Chayei Sarah and Toldot 5782
Rabbi Nachman Kahana

WHAT IF...

A: FAREWELL TO OUR HOLY MOTHER SARAH

Last week's parasha can be characterized as "the changing of the guard". From the generation of the founders to the generation of the successors. Our father Avraham passes away at the age of 175, and our mother Sarah at 127.

The Parsha Chaya Sarah begins:

And the life of Sarah extended for one hundred and twenty and seven years: the years of the life of Sarah

Rashi explains the closing phrase: "... the years of the life of Sarah comes to equate all of her years which were "good".

Is this an accurate assessment of Sarah's life, that they were all good years? Didn't Sarah suffer the indignity of being abducted twice, once by Paro then by Avimelech the Philistine? Didn't she suffer years of barrenness, giving birth only at the age of 90? Didn't she accompany her husband Avraham when they left their regional settings, birthplace and immediate family?

But the point of this phrase is to inform us that Sarah, the little girl born to a family of idol worshippers, with all that it implies, at 127 years old looked back over all her years and understood that every one was essential in contributing to turning the little girl called Sarei (her name before being changed by Hashem to Sarah) into the illustrious

matriarch of Am Yisrael.

Today, November 1st, my wife and I are celebrating 62 years of marriage. Two kids, a boy from Brooklyn and a good Jewish girl from the West Side of Manhattan, who one day in 1962 found themselves in a little wooden shack in Moshav Nekhalim, a kilometer away from the Jordanian border.

We were the victims of our simplistic, superficial, minimalistic Torah education in New York, where a little Judaism is good but not too much. What did we know about the backgrounds of the Jews we were now living with; the sufferings of the Shoah survivors, and the Jews from the Melachs (ghettos) of Arab lands. What did we know of Golani, paratroopers, basic training, annual reserve duty, Palmach, Shmitta year, etc.? Of going to the local grocer to buy a half loaf of bread because that's what most of the people on the moshav could afford.

When growing up in a Brooklyn Italian and Irish Catholic neighborhood, I knew that they and the other billion or so Christians hated me. But now suddenly, we have another billion Moslems who consider my wife and me to be the enemy. I recall our first day of aliyah in my Aunt Shoshana's home in Ramat Gan. I turned on the radio to hear some pure Ivrit, but wherever I turned the dial I heard Arabic. It finally dawned upon me how surrounded we were.

From the first moment we alighted from the great eagle that flew us home I realized that I was now a part of the 3500 years of my people's history; and from now on I would be taking my position "holding up the stretcher" of my people.

In her last day in this world, our mother Sarah reviewed her former life in Ur Kasdim devoid of HaShem and kedusha to her present status as matriarch of HaShem's chosen people. She closed her eyes and after reciting "Shema Yisrael" uttered one word to HaShem – "TODA".

When my time will come, I will look back to see from where I came and where HaShem had taken our family. I too will say "Shema Yisrael" and utter one word to my Creator – "TODA"!

B: GLOBAL WARMING

The present international conference in Glasgow Scotland (COP26) has been portrayed as "the world's last best chance to address the climate crisis".

Indeed, the globe is warming at a dangerous rate with climate disasters occurring more frequently all over the globe.

The conference has been called to seek remedies to prevent the ominous global disaster which would affect every human being.

If I was invited to address this august body of world leaders, I would say the following:

In Tractate Avoda Zara 3a, the Gemara states that in the future the gentile nations will be jealous of the reward that will be given to the Jewish people. HaShem will explain that the Jews earned that reward through their fulfillment of the Torah, even under the most horrific and inhuman conditions. All the same, HaShem will give the nations an opportunity to fulfill an "easy" mitzvah through which they will be tested; the mitzva of succa.

The nations will hasten to build succot on their rooftops. HaShem will then unleash the most intense sun's rays, and the globe will become very hot. After the nations receive permission to abandon their succot (in accordance with the principle that "one who suffers from residing in a succa is exempt from the mitzva"), they will kick down their succot and flee for their lives from the heat. Am Yisrael too, will leave their succot, but with great pain over their inability to fulfill the mitzvah.

Through this allegory, our sages aptly reveal how the world will look in the future.

At the end of the Second World War, the United Nations was established on the ruins of the “League of Nations”, which had been established after the First World War.

The U.N. is the aforementioned “easy mitzvah”, because a succah is defined as a “temporary home”, and the U.N. delegates from all over the world reside temporarily in New York rather than in their permanent homes.

HaShem’s “unleashing the sun” is a metaphor for the moral dilemmas facing the members of the U.N., first and foremost from the Iranian threat to annihilate the State of Israel, as well as worldwide anti-Semitism. The U.N. has not employed any means of punishing Iran, because when all is said and done, it is only Israel whom Iran threatens. The U.N.’s delegates continue to fail the “easy mitzvah” test, and we can begin the countdown on this evil organization’s demise and the nations which comprise it.

But this is not just a metaphor. It is a prediction of what is awaiting humanity if they continue to renege on their moral responsibility, first and foremost with regard to HaShem’s chosen nation.

Whatever the nations will decide at the conference will not change the dire fate that “nature” is imposing upon humanity. The only salvation for humanity is to renew its obligations and moral commitments of truth and acceptance that we are the Creator’s chosen people.

C: WHAT IF....

Let's play “what if”:

What if Paro would have submitted to Moshe's demands to permit the Jews three days of prayer plus one day of rest every week (Shabbat). Would the Jews still have insisted on leaving Egypt for the ominous, fierce desert or would they have rejected Moshe's plan?

What if the Meraglim (scouts) would have returned with a positive report and the Jews would have entered Eretz Yisrael in the second year of the exodus. Who would teach them all the details of the Torah, because HaShem in no way would permit Moshe to enter the land?

What if at the very harsh decision handed down by Shlomo HaMelech to cut the infant whose parentage was in question, the mother would not have urged Shlomo to give the baby to the other woman, would Shlomo have ordered severing of the baby?

Let's go a little further:

What if Medinat Yisrael would have been established 100 years earlier in 1848, and not 1948, when the greatest rabbis would have led the nation. Would there have been a Shoah?

What if Ben Gurion would not have agreed to the Chazon Ish's request to exempt all the yeshiva students from army service, where would the yeshiva world be today? But Ben Gurion did agree, so, in fact, the Torah kingdom we have today is the result of a decision taken by a man who was very far from Torah.

What if one or two of the recognized Torah leaders of American Jewry at the time of the establishment of the Medina would have called out to all Jews to make aliyah, how would the Medina look today?

What if all the thousands of shelichim of Chabad would have concentrated their efforts on influencing the Jews in Eretz Yisrael rather than being the world's biggest kosher caterers, how would our life be today?

But since all these “what ifs” did not occur, it is obvious that HaShem who directs all human actions yet retains His invisibility, did not want them to happen.

So, we must struggle on.

Shabbat Shalom

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