

Va'aira 5775

BS"D Parashat Va'aira 5775

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Choices during the Best & Worst of Times

In last week's parasha Shemot, Moshe demands that the Jews be allowed three days of freedom in order to worship HaShem, and Paro reacts by creating an impossible situation. The raw materials necessary for the slaves' labor would be withheld, yet they would be expected to maintain the same levels of production. Moshe expressed his deep disappointment at this turn of events by lamenting before HaShem the fact that he had been chosen for this failed mission.

This week's parasha opens with HaShem rebuking Moshe for being impatient with what he viewed as HaShem's departure from His stated goal of freeing the Jewish people. HaShem informs Moshe that retribution for the Egyptian cruelty to the Jewish people would now commence.

All periods in our history when Am Yisrael saw the hand of HaShem in our salvation, were similar to the exodus, in that they were preceded by moments of trepidation, anxiety, even despair.

When Yehoshua entered Eretz Yisrael, the Jews lost the initial battle at the small city of Iy, when 36 Jews were killed. This provoked a desperate, even critical response by Yehoshua, to HaShem.

The return of Am Yisrael to the Land after the destruction of the first Bet Hamikdash was filled with disappointment.

Koresh, King of Persia permitted the Jews to rebuild the Bet Hamikdash, even aiding them in every way. However, Koresh's initiative was cancelled by Achashverosh at the time of Purim, and was restored again by King Daryavesh, Esther's son, upon ascending the throne.

Ezra and Nechemia came to Eretz Yisrael to lead the people in the restoration of the Bet Hamikdash. But the Jews were hampered by the Samaritans to the degree that in every shift half the people would work while the other half would stand guard.

In our own time, we are being hampered, constrained, deterred and discouraged by our "friends", not to speak of our enemies who plan, conspire and attempt to implement the worst of their intentions.

Terrorism and the Final Test

In the latest blood-thirsty Islamic attacks in Paris where 17 people were murdered, including five of our Jewish brothers, our political leaders saw a spark of hope that now the self-centered, self-indulgent Europeans would awaken to the dangers and evils of Islam and unite in a joint effort to eradicate its presence there and elsewhere. Our Prime Minister called out to the Europeans to stand together with us against the Islamic Hamas and Hesbollah now that they themselves are feeling the cold blade against their throats. The feeling is that Israel is entering a new period of understanding, when the civilized, enlightened nations of Europe and the USA will no longer condemn our acts of self-defense, but will stand with us in defense of the values of freedom and justice.

I feel that the reality will prove just the opposite.

We will witness a depressing period of trepidation, anxiety, disappointment and frustration.

The perfidious and treacherous Christian nations of Europe will do nothing that might threaten their comfortable way of life. The proactive stance of the French government, at this moment, to protect all Jewish institutions is no more than the age-old attempt of Paro in parashat Shemot to prevent the Jewish people from leaving (1,11):

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*“...and they will leave the country.”
(known today as “brain drain”)*

To challenge the growing Moslem populations in their respective countries would require drafting and implementing draconian laws backed by tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of additional police and soldiers. It would lead to a new and assertive political and military stance vis-à-vis Arab and Moslem states. Economies would suffer. Comforts of life would have to be curtailed. Freedom of movement and free-speech would be limited, in the effort to eradicate the growing cancer of Caliphate and Jihad. And all this in order to contain the (perception of) evil created by the State of Israel’s prolonged occupation of Palestinian lands!!!

However they will find an alternative:

The United States and the countries of Europe would enter into agreement with “moderate” Arab states, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Egypt, and “temperate enlightened” Moslem countries, such as Turkey and Iran. And all together they would remove the Jihad threat from Europe. Despite the fact that the price for creating this treaty, as demanded by the Moslems, would be the sacrificing of the Jewish State on the altar of “peace in our time”.

This is the picture I see in this period of the final redemption of Am Yisrael. It too will be preceded by the age-old feelings of trepidation, anxiety, and frustration which

were the harbingers of earlier periods of HaShem's involvement in demonstrating His unique and intimate relationship with His chosen people.

The coming years will require profound spiritual strength on the part of those who love Eretz Yisrael.

We who await the realization of HaShem's promise for the renaissance of His nation in all of the Holy Land, will be challenged to prove the degree of our loyalty to HaShem.

It will be the best and the worst of times; the most exhilarating and thought-provoking in our long history. It will be the final test leading up to the return to us of all the land of Eretz Yisrael, according to its Biblical boundaries. It will see the return of all Am Yisrael, the rebuilding of the third Bet HaMikdash, the Sanhedrin, the Davidic monarchy and the restoration of Torah law, as stated by the Rambam in Hilchot Melachim chapters eleven and twelve.

Excerpt from the book "With All Your Might".

The book of Daniel, chapter 3, relates that King Nevuchadnetzer of Babylon erected a statue in the capital that was to be worshipped by representatives of the many lands and peoples he had conquered.

The King was informed that three of his Jewish administrators, Chananya, Misha'el and Azarya refused to bow to the idol. Nevuchadnetzer gave them the choice of either bowing down or being thrown into a fiery furnace and seeing if their God would save them. The Talmud (Pesachim 53b) records the deliberations which led up to their choice to offer up their lives on kidush hashem:

... 'וַיִּשְׁמְרוּ אֶת-שְׁמֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיהֶם' [שְׁמֵי ה'] וְיָבִיאוּ אֶת-נַפְשֵׁיהֶם וְיִשְׂרְפוּ בָהֶן וְיִשְׁמְרוּ אֶת-שְׁמֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵיהֶם' וְיָבִיאוּ אֶת-נַפְשֵׁיהֶם וְיִשְׂרְפוּ בָהֶן

“Chanaya Misha’el and Azarya decide on what their mode of action would be from the frogs in the second of the ten plagues. The frogs are not commanded to sanctify the name of G-d, however, we as Jews, are so commanded. The frogs went into the burning ovens as it says (Shemot 7) ‘and they will come into the ovens’, then we certainly have to give our lives for the sanctification of God’s name, even in the ovens”.

After reading this, I wondered why they said that the frogs were not commanded to go into the ovens. Did God not command Moses to tell Pharaoh (Shemot 7,28) “And the river will swarm with frogs, which shall go up and come into your house, and into your bed chamber and upon your bed ...and into your ovens and into your kneading troughs!”?

I explained the intention of the three men as follows: God indeed said that the frogs would enter the ovens, but He did not state which particular frog would do so. When the frogs entered a house, one would say, “The verse states that we will come into the house. Therefore, I am hereby fulfilling God’s wishes by sitting on this easy chair in the living room watching TV”. The second frog sees the verse which says, “and into your bed chamber”, and he hops unto the thick soft carpet, thereby also fulfilling God’s command. A third frog reads the verse which says “and upon your bed”, and jumps between the sheets and dozes off, thereby also fulfilling God’s wishes.

However another frog sees that the verse also reads “and into your ovens”, and he jumps into the oven to sanctify the Holy Name.

In our times, people who are true to God’s Torah have taken

upon themselves a multitude of obligations. Some sanctify the Name by staying in Antwerp Belgium and dealing in diamonds, while keeping the Torah, like the frogs on the couch. Others choose to live in Baltimore or Cleveland or New York, where they study Torah and support the land of Israel by visiting every several years, like the frogs sleeping on the thick bedroom rug.

Others live in Tel Aviv where they tie their existence to the fate of the Jewish state. Others brave to live in Yerushalayim, even in the Old City. And others jump into the fire to defend the Holy Land and its people.

How we use the short time that HaShem grants us on this planet is determined by our freedom to choose. To learn Torah, perform mitzvot and take part in the physical defense of this land, is the ultimate sanctification of HaShem's name.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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