

Va'aira 5777

BS"D Parashat Va'aira 5777

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

Overzealous Patriotism

The Midrash on parashat Va'etchana (Devarim parasha 2) records an emotionally charged dialogue between HaShem and Moshe regarding the final denial of Moshe's request to enter Eretz Yisrael.

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Moshe: Why do you deny me the mitzva of living in Eretz Yisrael, while permitting the remains of Yosef to be buried there?

HaShem: He (Yosef) who acknowledged his homeland may enter, but he (Moshe) who did not acknowledge his homeland may not enter.

HaShem was referring to two instances where Yosef acknowledged his birth in Eretz Yisrael. When Potifar's wife revealed to Potifar that the "Hebrew slave" had attacked her, and later when Yosef informs the sar hamashkim (royal wine keeper) that he was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews.

But when Moshe was introduced by Yitro's daughter as "esh

mitzri" – an Egyptian Man – he did not protest, nor did he correct them.

One might get the impression from this Midrash that Hashem was too harsh on Moshe, because the simple fact is that Yosef was born in Eretz Yisrael (the land of Israel), whereas Moshe was born in Egypt.

However, the Midrash is teaching us a basic lesson regarding what a Jew's self-identification must be – that no matter where a Jew is born his motherland is Eretz Yisrael.

The Midrash (Bamidbar 15) relates that the Jews were deceptively drawn into slavery by their overzealous patriotism to Egypt. They eagerly answered the call for voluntary national service, when at the end of the day they found themselves slaves to Paro.

One who sees the holy land as his motherland will never fall into the pit of excessive patriotism to any other nation.

The Price of Patriotism in Exile

President Trump sincerely seeks to make America great again. He has plans, programs, ideas, proposal, propositions, projects, procedures, strategy, stratagems etc., on how to go about realizing his dream. But however ambitious and diverse these objectives might be, they are all contingent on one factor – patriotism. For if there is no love of country and willingness to sacrifice for its security and economic advancement nothing will change.

For the millions who attended the inauguration ceremony in person or saw it through the media it was a time for patriotic love for their country, as they viewed the pomp and circumstance. Pride in being citizens in the most free, most powerful and most prosperous of the family of nations.

The formula for measuring the degree of pride and patriotism among the Jews in the United States is the converse of their pride and patriotism to their own motherland, Eretz Yisrael.

The secular, reform and conservatives are the most patriotic of Jews; feeling as American as anyone whose ancestors came on the Pilgrim's Mayflower ship, because their connection to Eretz Yisrael is non-existent.

The religious segment of American Jewry is, despite some warm feeling for the holy land, total loyalty as citizens of America, even relying on halachic sources to base their attachment to that gentile county.

In a very short time the Jews of America will have the opportunity to exhibit their love and devotion to the "stars and stripes".

One way of making America great again, was expressed by President Trump when he declared his intention to increase the military by at least an additional two hundred thousand soldiers. His declared war on Islamic terror will require the presence of American troops in many parts of the globe, including Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Americas. Mr. Trump will not get 200 thousand capable intelligent volunteers for the expanded military. He will have to introduce a selective service act (draft) to reach that number.

To state it plainly: Your sons and daughters will be drafted into the US military. I have stated this many times in the past, but the time will soon arrive when it will become reality.

The price for your patriotism to a gentile country over your devotion to HaShem's holy land will be paid in full by your sons and daughters. Instead of spending years in yeshiva or seminary in Israel, your sons and daughters will be crawling on their stomachs in the boot camps of Georgia and Texas, in preparation to be shipped out for years to places whose names

you can't even spell.

2000 years ago, HaShem expelled the Jewish nation from His land. And while in the many lands of our galut we always longed to return home, we never pledged allegiance to the gentile lands in which we were forced to live. We lived there, but always on the periphery of society, not only as a result of our being rejected by the mainstream of gentile society, but more so due to our sustained loyalty to HaShem's Torah and His Holy Land. However, things have changed dramatically. There are today over 65 million refugees in the world, but not one of them is a Jew.

Never in the last 2000 years was there a time when some Jewish community was not being expelled or suffering from any of the diabolical tortures that the gentile mind was able to impose on their hapless Jews. But today, the Jews have entered the mainstream of the societies in which they live – the United States, most of Europe, South Africa and others. The change is very apparent in the attitude of the Jews who, as loyal citizens, pledge allegiance to their respective lands and societies.

An Excerpt from With All Your Might

The following is a short story from my book "With All Your Might" which makes the situation a bit more realistic.

The phone rang in the nearly desolate, topsy-turvy home of the Levines. Mrs. Levine nervously let the wrapping cord fall from her hand as she picked up the phone. Too late. The light on the phone's base signaled that there was a recorded message.

She pushed the "listen" button and a familiar voice spoke:

"Hello, this is Miri from Nefesh be'Neshama. I have two messages for you; a happy one and another a bit disappointing.

The movers will be coming to your home tomorrow morning, Monday, at exactly 7:00 AM, so please be ready. And the not so happy news. I know how much you wanted the three ABC seats by the window, because of your names Al, Beth and Carol, plus the adjoining D seat of the middle section for David, on this Thursday's flight. But because you are a family of four you were assigned the four DEFG seats in the middle section. In any event, the thrill of going on aliyah will certainly overshadow any such minor irritations. Aliya tova!"

Miri was so right, Mrs. Levine thought to herself. The thrill of a dream-come-true leaves no room for such mundane issues as seating on a plane; although it would have been nice to see the coastline of Israel drawing closer as the "wings of eagles" brought us home.

Al and Beth Levine had decided to come on aliyah five years ago, when Carol was ten and David celebrated his Bar-Mitzva. However, it took five years for Al to find a suitable replacement in his law firm in addition to the protracted process of selling the house for the right price. But thank God, the local shul bought it to serve as the community home for whomever would be serving as rabbi at the time.

In the interim, the Levines kept their dream alive by keeping up with current events in Israel, as well as developments in the Middle East in general.

It was the middle of August 2006. Tensions were high as Iran, patron of the murderous Hezbollah and Hamas gangs, continued to develop a nuclear capacity. The United Nations Security Council passed a limited economic boycott resolution against Iran. In an angry knee-jerk response, the Iranians decreased their sale of oil and the world price jumped to \$100 a barrel! As if this were not bad enough, Venezuela's leftist president signed a ten-year agreement to sell its oil exclusively to China, which brought the price of gas at the filling stations to \$5 a gallon, with no end in sight that this would be the

determining price at the pump.

But none of this could detract from their decision to come on aliyah. David was to begin Bar Ilan University right after the holidays and Carol had registered in the Ulpan in Kiryat Arba. Since youngsters of David's age in Israel are drafted into the IDF, it could have deterred the family's decision to make aliyah, but David was promised that he would be permitted to finish his BA uninterrupted by army service. With this issue behind them, there was really nothing to prevent the Levines from taking the step of a lifetime.

The family was disturbed by the attitude of some relatives and friends who, perhaps for reasons of jealousy or personal weakness, were very critical of their aliyah plans. "What's the rush? Wait until the children finish school. You're now at your peak earning power. Is this the time to leave?"

On the other hand, their rabbi was wonderful. On Shabbat he spoke from the pulpit about the mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisrael. He praised the Levines, saying how they would be missed in the many areas of their community involvement – Al for giving up his Sundays in order to coach the shul's little league team, Beth for being the Shabbat kiddush coordinator, Carol for helping her mother with the kiddushes and David for managing the various teen activities of the shul.

Of course, the rabbi was careful to point out that the mitzvah of living in Eretz Yisrael was in the category of a four-corner garment – not mandatory to wear; but if one should do so, he would be required to attach to it tzitzit and merit a mitzvah. So too, one is not required to "go up to the land" until the Mashiach comes; but if one should do so, he merits a great mitzvah.

To their skeptical friends and relatives, Al responded that there had been too many warnings of late and that the time had come to go home. So, if not now, then when?

The war in Iraq was not going well, and the new Iraqi government was requesting additional American troops in light of the British decision to "bring the boys home". American soldiers had been sent to the Philippines to help in their war against Al Qaeda, and Colombia was requesting a US military presence in their on-going war against the insurgence. To complicate matters, Mexico had just elected a leftist president, who spoke of an anti-United States axis composed of Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia.

It was Monday and, true to Miri's message, the movers arrived at 7:00 AM sharp to take all the Levine's worldly possessions to the packing company, and from there to Israel.

Packing was an unforgettable experience. Mrs. Levine wondered how they "succeeded" to accumulate so much "stuff" during 20 years of marriage. They started in the attic, which served as a nostalgic trip into the past and evoked many memories as they rummaged through their possessions – the less-than-modest wedding gown which Mrs. Levine did not want her Carol to see, a 78 RPM record player, Al's catcher's mitt which he could not part with, old photographs from the Pineview and Pioneer Hotels and summer camps. How these experiences had sweetened with the passage of time.

But life must go on, as the family used mental scissors to begin severing these ties in anticipation of their new life in the promised land.

Eventually, much was given away, more was thrown out, and the necessary articles were now packed in cartons to be shipped off. In the packing process, the Levines concluded that Moshe Rabbeinu was right in ordering the Jews to leave with only a few matzot; because if they would have been permitted to bring their possessions, we would still be in Mitzrayim.

Ten in the morning and the movers had finished only about half the work.

At that moment, a Western Union messenger arrived with a telegram for Mr. David Levine.

Al signed for it, opened the envelope and read aloud.

“Greetings.

You are hereby informed that The President of the United States of America and Commander in Chief of the armed forces, and Congress in emergency session, have passed the Selective Service Act of 2006, to be enforced immediately.

You are hereby ordered to report within one week to the Induction Center at 1948 Independence Avenue for induction into the armed services for a period of not less than three years. You will be sent to Paris Island, Georgia to commence basic training as a proud United States Marine.

Your passport will be on hold until the completion of your military service.

Good luck and Godspeed to you in the service of your country.”

Just as Al was handing the telegram to Beth, the phone rang. He got there too late to answer, but the light on the phone’s base signaled that there was a recorded message.

Al pushed the “listen” button and a familiar voice sounded.

“Hello, this is Miri again from Nefesh be’Neshama. Good news. Due to last- minute cancellations, we have been able to get for you the three ABC seats near the window and the D in the middle.”

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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