

Va'etchanan 5775

BS"D Parashat Va'etchanan 5775

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

The Historical Beginning of Anti-Semitism

The opening of my writings (and of many others) are three letters BS"D which are a contraction of the words בש"ד בש"ד – With the aid of HaShem (heaven)".

They are also the three letters used by present day anti-Semites; they stand for Boycott, Sanctions and Divestment.

The inference is that despite, and from out of, their evil intentions, Medinat Yisrael with the aid of HaShem will increase in area, grow in every human capacity, and prosper, as stated by our holy prophets.

When did the Ge'ula Begin?

We are into the 68th year of the miracle called "Medinat Yisrael" and into the 49th year of the reunification of Yerushalayim, yet the Mashiach has not arrived.

We cannot determine when the process of redemption began. It might have been on November 2, 1917 with the Balfour Declaration. Or on the 29th of November 1947 with the UN vote recognizing a Jewish State in Eretz Yisrael. Or the arrival of the Vilna Gaon's students in the 18th century or my great

grandfather's aliya to Tzfat in 1863.

But it is clear to all who are sensitive to the ebb and flow of the tides of Jewish history that the process of redemption went into high gear the moment when David Ben Gurion declared the establishment of the Medina on May 14th, 1948.

But many feel that stagnation has set in, and the forward thrust of ge'ula has weakened. Where is the impediment, the obstruction?

A Nation that Dwells Alone

Chazal teach us that God tried Abraham ten times. The sacrifice of Isaac was the ninth test, and the difficult negotiations with Efron, the Hittite, in Chevron over the purchase of the Cave of Machpelah as a burial place for Sarah, our Matriarch, was the tenth and ultimate test.

In the accepted order of testing, each test is progressively more difficult. Why was the difficult financial negotiations with Efron more challenging than the ninth test of sacrificing Yitzchak?

Let's understand Avraham's situation at the time.

HaShem commanded Avraham to leave his country, the land of his birth, and his father's home and go to an as yet unspecified land. Only when Avraham arrived in the Holy Land did HaShem reveal to him that it was so, and the land is now in his sole ownership and that of his descendants for all time.

At the time, the continent of Europe was sparsely settled, as were Africa, Asia and certainly the Americas. But instead of settling in one of these empty places, Avraham was ordered to go to the most crowded part of the planet – the narrow strip of land at the eastern end of the Mediterranean, populated by

10 nations with hundreds of thousands, and possibly millions of people.

They were the descendants of Cham, son of Noah. Whose ancestors arrived in the Holy Land long, long before Avraham was born. They worked its fields, built cities and places of worship. They had deeds of ownership over their holdings, and courts of law to settle disagreements including police to enforce the laws. These children of Cham had highly developed societies which evolved over many centuries, including religious beliefs and practices with a political and clerical hierarchy.

At this crossroads in their lives came a stranger from the East whose ways were alien to them, and whose message was challenging to their core beliefs.

The Torah relates that at some point the deliberations between Avraham and Efron, which were not going well, Avraham calls out:

אני ארמי ואני תושב בארץ

“I am an alien and a resident among you.”

Rashi cites the Midrash which explains what Avraham was saying: “If you wish to sell the Cave of Machpela to me, I will pay even more than the going price. However, if you adamantly refuse, I hereby inform you that the Almighty has already given me all these lands; I have the right to possess any part of it at will”.

What transpired after this declaration is not known, but the Torah records that Efron agreed to sell the Cave of Machlela in return for a substantial amount of silver.

It would not be difficult to imagine the effect Avraham’s declaration had on the general population and certainly on its leaders. If until now, Avraham had been accepted as a

spiritual individual with a religious message for the world, he was now perceived as a usurper of all that existed in the land. His friends and those who respected him drew away from this dangerous revolutionary, who would turn all life upside down. He would undo the Pagan religious practices and violate the laws of ownership. He was the ultimate revolutionary who spoke in name of a Deity they did not recognize.

Herein lies the ultimate test that Avraham had to face. To stand alone – an interloper, intruder, trespasser – and declare that the land of Israel is his inheritance from the Creator himself. This is a test that only one man could have passed.

What Avraham was actually saying was that HaShem had given to him and his future offspring not only the region of Canaan, but all the lands from the Euphrates River in the north and east to the Mediterranean in the west, to the Nile River.

This could well have been the beginning of anti-Semitism when Abraham, the Jew, is regarded by all as a threat to their way of lives and beliefs. It began a confrontation between the Gentiles and the Jews which was destined to remain until HaShem would reveal Himself again, as stated by the prophets.

It could very well be that our next stage of ge'ula is waiting for a present day Avraham. A leader who will stand in the Knesset in Yerushalayim and declare to the world: "We, the Jews in the State of Israel, are the sole legal owners of every centimeter of land in the area deemed by the Torah to be Eretz Yisrael. We received these lands as a gift from the Creator Himself, and our deed is the Torah. No power on earth can uproot us from here without the expressed consent of the Almighty. We will build our cities and settlements on every hill and valley in the Golan, in Yehuda and the Shomron. We will have zero tolerance for any non-Jew who would raise a finger against a Jew, or claim national or religious rights in the land".

If this sounds imaginary, fantastic, utopian or even impossible – agreed! Except that this was the challenge our father Avraham faced when standing before the Hittites in Chevron. And this is what made him HaShem's first Jew, in whose merit we all live today.

The root of our problems is our lack of Jewish pride based on our intimate relationship with the Creator. Every lowlife can grab the headlines by ranting against God's chosen people – and we remain apathetic.

Our galut complex forces us to conceal who we really are. First and foremost is the desire of most Jews to be accepted by Gentiles. A desire that runs counter to HaShem's decree voiced by Bil'am who declared that we shall be:

אֶתְּנֶנְךָ לְעַמֵּי אֶרֶץ חָרָב

“A nation that dwells alone.”

No nation can “dwell alone” in the interactive world in which we live. The intent is that the Jewish-Halachic way of life is unique among the nations and its uniqueness must be maintained by law and spirit.

There is no more degrading form of the Jewish inferiority complex than whole Jewish communities living in the “paradise” of galut when the gates to Eretz Yisrael are wide open. This Chillul HaShem could be very perilous for the Jewish nation if HaShem would take them seriously. But fortunately the interaction between HaShem, our Father-in-Heaven, and Am Yisrael is maintained only with the Jews in Eretz Yisrael.

May HaShem open our eyes and hearts to the truth of who we really are.

May He send us the “Avraham” that we so much need in this time in our ascent to the heights of greatness promised by the prophets.

May we all merit the words of this week's haftara:

אֲנִי-אֶחָד מִבְּנֵי אֲדָמָה וְאַתָּה אֵלֹהֵינוּ

Be comforted! Be comforted, My nation", says your God.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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