

# Va'et'chanan 5779

BS"D Parashat Va'et'chanan, Shabbat Nachamu and the 15th of Menachem Av 5779

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

## A most appropriate time for a major miracle

An indisputable fact comes to light to all who follow the weekly parasha with one eye, and current events with the other. Each parasha casts its spell on the events of its respective week. Therefore, in hindsight, we stand amazed at the correlation between the major events of this past week and the parasha; and we feel so fretfully “stupid” that, with all our knowledge of the parasha, we were unable to predict what was going to happen.

Our parasha begins with Moshe informing the Jewish nation that HaShem has turned down his pleas to enter Eretz Yisrael. Moshe is turned down 515 times (gematria of the word “va'et'chanan”), despite his iron-clad arguments proving that he has merited to perform the mother-of-all mitzvot – yishuv Eretz Yisrael – to settle in the Land of Israel.

The 515 pleas, supplications and entreaties to enter the land, followed by the immense feelings of love that Moshe demonstrates for the land, typify this week's events. How many tearful prayers were directed to HaShem for the welfare and integrity of Eretz Yisrael? Nearly 2000 Jews ascended the Temple Mount on Tish'a B'Av to declare before HaShem that we have not forgotten, nor will we ever forget, the words of His prophets that He will restore the grandeur that was once

Yerushalayim.

The events now being played out in the Holy Land are another part of HaShem's great design – one more in the conundrum of infinite questions the Mashiach will have to explain. However it plays out in the labyrinth of human events, we will patiently and silently trust in His will.

In keeping with the spirit of our parasha of supplication regarding Eretz Yisrael, I too lift up my eyes and humbly request the following from our Father the King.

Avinu sh'baShamayim, I come before You not even as a drop of water is to the ocean, but less than one of the tens of billions of atoms which constitute a drop of water. So there is no reason that You should have to pay attention to my words, but You must! You are responsible for me being an entity of existence; and as a part of Your handiwork, I possess some degree of importance and even more, because You cast into my frail being the holy neshama of a Jew.

I sit here among Your children of Israel. I am one of them, replete with all the failings and weaknesses that are inherent in us, plus the obstinate and blind qualities we acquired by living in the Galut among the children of Yishmael and Esav.

As a Jew in Eretz Yisrael, I know the nature of my brothers and sisters here. I promise You that, as things stand today, those who have strayed from Your Torah will not do teshuva.

I am certain that this is not an alarming chidush (new idea) for You. But my chidush is – and one for which I give my word and solemn oath – that if You reveal Yourself, even in the smallest way, this nation will return to You in love, loyalty and devotion never seen in any previous generation.

HaShem, please remember that no one is keeping us here. Why do the people who have strayed from the Torah stubbornly insist on maintaining this impossible State of Israel – an arid land

on the edge of the desert, with hardly any raw materials to guarantee a livelihood and surrounded by enemies whose numbers we can no longer even estimate?

It is because deep down the people in Eretz Yisrael await Your imminent return, as a wife awaits her beloved husband who has gone off to war.

Never was there a generation as faithful to Jewishness as the people of Medinat Yisrael. If You just open the door a crack, You will find a people who have gleaned from all the sources of human history. There is genius here out of proportion to any country in the world:

- Expert architects, designers and engineers just waiting to rebuild Your Holy Temple to surpass the glory and beauty of the two which were destroyed
- Artists, scientists, men and women of profound thought
- Courageous young soldiers who will uproot the evil in this world as they avenge what was done to Your people for thousands of years
- Talmidei chachamim whose scope of expertise surpasses that of any previous generation
- Rabbanim whose halachic decisions range from the most minute details dealt with by scientists to the question of reciting kiddush lavana for people standing on the moon

The moral level and dignity of man expressed even in these most difficult of times will blossom into halachic categories and embrace all of humanity.

Of course, You know about all the intriguing conversations held in taxi cabs. How many times have drivers said to me, "I am not religious"? Then they go on to say, "I never ate anything treif in my life nor would I ever drive my car on Shabbat, but I'm not religious." How about the many teenagers who, while not dressed in very modest attire, enter their

homes or buildings and always kiss the mezuzah?

Father in Heaven. We have strayed, but it is less our fault than the circumstances of our destiny. The love and devotion displayed daily here in Eretz Yisrael for the way of life You have commanded us deserves to be acknowledged by You.

There is a great nation awaiting Your return. Moshe was a great man, so much so that he could suffer to be rejected 515 times. We, however, are brittle and fragile human beings who cannot suffer rejection for very long. We overcame the Shoah. We returned to Your land. We have fought Your battles. Now the time has come to open the palace door and let Your princely children return to the glory which was once theirs.

The 15th of the month of Menachem Av is approaching. It is one of the two days in the year which the Mishna designates as "the happiest days" (the other being Yom Kippur).

Would it be so impertinent of me to suggest that this Shabbat (1950 years since the destruction of the Second Temple) would be an appropriate time for a major miracle?

The eyes of the world are upon Israel. You are the Master of drama and irony. What better way to bring down the curtain on this sad scene of 2000 years of history and open a new one of hope, redemption and kedusha!

If You open the way, even as narrow as the eye of a needle, we will enlarge it as wide as the entrance to the Holy Temple. Bring peace to Your confrontational children as a father restores calm among his feuding sons. We cannot solve the differences among ourselves, so it remains for You to show the way.

You have made us to be born from four different mothers – Rachel, Leah, Bilha and Zilpa – in order to diversify the Jewish genius, but we come from one father Ya'akov. You have dispersed us over the four corners of the globe in order to

diversify our keeping of the Torah, and You have returned us home to Eretz Yisrael, just as You brought back our father Ya'akov.

Harav Sa'adia Gaon has stated that we are a nation only by virtue of the Torah. The time has come to restore the feelings of brotherhood here in Eretz Yisrael under the canopy of the Torah. Only You can bring this about.

Give us one more chance – we won't disappoint You.

## **FOR THE 15th OF MENACHEM AV**

The Mishna in Tractate Ta'anit states: "There were no happier days (yamim tovim) than Yom Kippur and the 15th of Av." In Tractate Ta'anit of the Jerusalem Talmud, our sages state that the reason Yom Kippur is a yom tov is obvious, for on this day our sins are eradicated. However, they ask, what transpired on the 15th of Av to elevate it to the level of happiness of Yom Kippur?

And the Gemara explains that on this day, Hoshea ben Ela, King of the northern tribes of Israel, rescinded the edict prohibiting the Jews of the northern tribes from going up to Yerushalayim.

In order to fully appreciate what this meant, we have to go back 300 years prior to the time of Hoshea ben Ela. The arch-evil Yeravam ben Nevat incited the people of the northern tribes to secede from the union that had begun with the kings, Shaul, followed by David, Shlomo and then his son Rechavam.

In order to complete the secession, Yeravam began expounding the Torah in his own way, thereby creating the first reform movement. However, the formal act of secession was

accomplished by closing the roads to Yerushalayim.

He created two substitute spiritual centers of Bet El and Dan in the north; because he knew that as long as the connection to Yerushalayim existed, his break-away nation would not endure.

Yeravam ordered guards to be stationed along the entire border in order to strictly enforce the prohibition against going to Yerushalayim. This situation continued for more than three hundred years, during which time the Jews of the north were severed from Yerushalayim and the Holy Temple.

Upon ascending the throne, Hoshea ben Ela withdrew the border guards and opened the way to Yerushalayim – and this happened on the 15th of Av.

This was, indeed, a day paralleling Yom Kippur, for now the Jews would be able to offer korbanot in the Mikdash and to achieve atonement for their sins.

After this explanation in the Jerusalem Talmud, Rav Kahana asks: If Hoshea was such a great man, why then did HaShem permit Shalmanetzer, King of Assyria, to invade the northern tribes and exile all the Jews in Hoshea's time?

The Talmud answers that Hoshea ben Ela opened the way to Yerushalayim – BUT NO ONE CAME!

He was punished, because he did not use his authority to encourage and convince the people to renew their covenant with the Holy City.

The Talmud goes on to explain that in the 300 years when pilgrimage to the Holy City was prohibited by the evil kings, the Heavenly Court could not accuse the people of the north of neglecting their responsibilities to Yerushalayim. However, now that the government of Hoshea had permitted the movement of people to the Holy City, there was no longer an excuse for

not going. It was as if HaShem were saying, "You did not come to My house, so I will eject you from your houses."

Therefore, this is the most appropriate day for the rabbis throughout the galut to utilize their authority and influence to encourage their congregations to leave the galut and return home.

When was the last time your rabbi stood at the pulpit and banged his fist on the lectern demanding that the congregation "go up to the Land, as I am about to do?"

Shabbat Shalom and have a happy 15th of Menachem Av

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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