

Vayakhel and Pekudei 5781

BS"D Parshiot Vayakhel and Pekudei 5781

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Time!

This week, as we close the book of Shemot – still under the spell of our miraculous exodus from Egypt – joined together with our waning memories of last week's Purim, a bittersweet Purimdika story comes to mind that has relevance to the lives of many Jews today.

A chicken farmer cried out desperately to the rebbe for an eitzza (suggestion), because his chickens were dying. The rebbe told the man to feed them wheat. Two weeks later, the farmer returned crying to the rebbe for another suggestion because the chickens were still dying. This time the rebbe told the man to feed them barley. Two weeks later, the scenario repeated itself; and this time, the rebbe told the man to feed the chickens corn. Two weeks later, the man came crying desperately to the rebbe, "Does the rebbe have any more suggestions?" The rebbe replied, "The question is not how many suggestions I have, the question is how many chickens do you have left?"

This story comes to illuminate the most essential component of life: TIME!

There is "big time" like the longevity of the created universe. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 97a) states that our world (most probably meaning humanity) will survive for 6000 years, and then it will be destroyed for another 1000 or 2000 years, at which time HaShem will usher in a new episode of human existence. Some kabbalists maintain that the universe will go

through seven periods of 7,000 years and will then be destroyed; and yet others (Rabbeinu Becha'ya commenting on Bamidbar 10:35) maintain that the universe will go through 18,000 jubilees of 50,000 years each (or 900,000,000 years) before the Great Day of Judgement.

As impressive as these numbers are what is relevant for us mortals is the fleeting flash of 70-80 years of our existence in this world, and how we perform the service of HaShem during that time.

For the past 20 years, I have been sending out divrei Torah; I believe without missing a week.

That's 50-plus divrei Torah times 20 years, equal to not less than 1000 divrei Torah. The vast majority of these writings are variations on the theme of escaping the spiritual and physical (and of late, the financial) death sentence of the galut. And, as in the story of the rabbi and the chicken farmer, I can say: "I have, God willing, many more divrei Torah. However, the question is, how much time do you have left in the galut?"

Until a year and a half ago, many Jews in the galut could have returned to Eretz Yisrael, purchased beautiful homes, and had stacks of money left over. The situation has declined dramatically and will continue to do so into a never-ending black hole. Many who could have come on aliya can no longer do so, unless they are willing to walk away from their beautiful homes which have become gilded cages. The public school system will forever be indebted to religious Jews for sending their bright children to P.S. something-or-other, because the parents will no longer be able to afford the yeshiva tuition. Shuls will be repossessed by the banks for failure to pay the mortgages, together with many more communal and private tragedies.

On the positive side, many families will be making their own

seder at home this year – perhaps for the first time, after cancelling their reservations at the hotels, and their cruises to Aruba where they would robustly sing, year after year, “Next year in Yerushalayim.”

Last week’s haftara for Parshat Para was from Yechezkel 36:

“I dispersed them among the nations, and they were scattered through the countries; I judged them according to their conduct and their actions. And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, ‘These are the LORD’s people, and yet they had to leave His land.’

I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they had gone. “Therefore, say to the house of Israel, ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Sovereign LORD, when I show myself holy through you before their eyes.” ‘For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols’.”

The prophet delivers HaShem’s message: that the Jews in exile profaned HaShem’s holy name, not through non-halachic conduct or social inadequacies, but by the simple fact that they were there and not in Eretz Yisrael, as the verse states: “And wherever they went among the nations they profaned My holy name, for it was said of them, ‘These are the LORD’s people, and yet they had to leave His land.’”

The prophet could not have been referring to a period when the Jews in galut could not return due to the prohibition placed on them by occupying nations. He is obviously referring to a period when Jews will be able to return but will choose not to do so. He is referring to all the Jews now in the galut, beginning with those who are unversed in Torah law, up to the most recognized religious leaders there.

They can give all the excuses in the world, and I am sure that there is an honorable place in Gan Eden for people who have lived by good excuses based on pilpul and “das Torah.” But, in the words of a rebbe of mine in Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yaakov Yosef when I came late to shiur with a great excuse: “Fun tay’ru’tzim vet min nisht a talmid chacham” – “I can’t punish you because you have an excuse, but from excuses one does not become a talmid chacham.” All the excuses and pilpulistic manipulations cannot justify remaining in the galut after the establishment of Medinat Yisrael.

This week, on Shabbat Parshat Ha’Chodesh, we will read from the Torah the first mitzva HaShem commanded the Jewish nation – calculating and ushering in the new months and years. This brings to mind the first commentary of Rashi on the Book of Bereishiet, quoting from Midrash Tanchuma that, since the Torah is the book of mitzvot of the Jewish nation, it should begin with the first mitzva which HaShem commanded us, the calculation and declaration of new months and years, not the story of creation.

The Midrash explains that HaShem began the Torah with the story of creation in order to refute future claims by the nations that the Jewish people illegally seized Eretz Yisrael. Then, the Jews and the gentile nations will know that HaShem, as the Creator of all that exists, has the right to give Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish nation at the expense of all others.

If all the Jews in the world were here today in Eretz Yisrael, the claim that we stole Eretz Yisrael from the poor Canaanites

3500 years ago, and again 72 years ago from that great, selfless, altruistic, beneficent, benevolent, charitable, generous, good, humane, idealistic, kindly, philanthropic, intelligent, merciful nation of Palestinians would be politically, religiously, and historically false.

But the fact is that many religious people, including prominent rabbis, choose to remain in the galut, and thus the claim that the land does not belong to the Jewish people acquires greater prominence in international circles. This, in turn, creates a preferential atmosphere for vehement anti-Semitism, which is chillul HaShem in its extreme.

As stated above, rabbis in Eretz Yisrael have reams and reams of divrei Torah to disseminate, but the 72-year window of opportunity for the Jews in galut is quickly being shut. Not everyone will come. And just as in Noach's ark, where only a hand-picked sampling by HaShem of each species was saved, HaShem is selecting those whom He wishes to be in Eretz Yisrael at this time.

When constructing the Mishkan, and later in the construction of the Beit HaMikdash, workmen of all sorts walked in all the areas of the site. Rambam states that if the construction required an artisan who was not a kohen or even one who was ritually impure, he performed his task even in the area designated to be the Holy of Holies. But when the Mishkan was completed and the areas were designated for their sanctified tasks, the only ones permitted to enter were the ritually pure kohanim.

As we are now building the future redemption of Am Yisrael, all who can participate are invited. God-fearing Jews, together with less observant Jews, and even Gentiles are joining together in this modern day "Mishkan" of Eretz Yisrael.

There is still time to leave the galut, but not much. Your

decision to take part in our return home must be made today!
Now! If you tarry, who knows what the future will hold for the
Jews left behind.

B here JLMM Jewish Lives Matter More

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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