

Vayechi 5780

BS"D Parashat Vayechi 5780

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

An Angel to Guard You

In our parasha, Ya'akov blesses Yosef and through him all the brothers:

וְיַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-יֹאמֵר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לְךָ וְיַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-יֹאמֵר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לְךָ

And Yisrael said to Yosef: I am about to pass away. HaShem will be with you and will return you to the land of your forefathers.

And the Torah states in Mishpatim 23:20:

וְיַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-יֹאמֵר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לְךָ וְיַעֲשֵׂה יְהוָה כָּל-אֲשֶׁר-יֹאמֵר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לְךָ

Behold, I am sending an angel to guard you in the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared for you.

The Selective Service Act of 2020

President Trump, may HaShem grant him long life, announced that in the wake of the deliberate neglect of the Obama administration of the US military and the threatening dangers of Moslem radical nations and others, the United States has spent two trillion dollars (that is \$2,000,000,000,000) on upgrading the US armed forces over the last three years. New and repaired planes, ships, submarines and “stuff” we don’t talk about.

I am quite certain that the next phase in strengthening the military will, by necessity, be the re-introduction of the Selective Service Act (draft) which was ended in the late 1970s. I have often written of the pending reinstatement of the draft, but now it is imminent.

The following is a short story I wrote depicting events in one family when the draft will, without prior warning, be announced.

The phone rang in the nearly desolate, topsy-turvy home of the Levines.

Mrs. Beth Levine nervously let the wrapping cord fall from her hand as she ran to answer 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 b'Nefesh. I was happy to learn that the movers are scheduled to arrive at your home tomorrow morning at 7:00 AM. I have some news that you may not be happy about since 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 Tuesday'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 aliya will certainly overshadow 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 aliya five years ago, when Carol was ten and David had his bar-mitzva. However, it took five years for Al to find a suitable replacement in his law firm; in addition, selling the house for the right price was a protracted process. But thank God, the local shul bought it to serve as the community home for whichever rabbi would be serving at the time.

In the interim, the Levines kept up with current events in Israel, as well as developments in the Middle East, and kept their dream alive. Tension was high. Iran, patron of the murderous Hezbollah, Hamas and other proxy military groups in parts of the world were becoming "annoying" with its on-going quest to develop nuclear weapons. Russia was flexing its aggressive muscles and the war to defeat ISIS was far from over.

But none of this could detract from their decision to come on aliya. David is to begin Bar Ilan University right after the holidays and Carol is registered in the Ulpan in Kiryat Arba. David was the crisis person in the decision. Youngsters of his age in Israel are drafted into the IDF, 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 one annoying factor in their aliya was the attitude of some relatives and friends, who, perhaps for reasons of jealousy or personal weakness, were very critical of their aliya 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, the Rabbi was wonderful. On Shabbat he spoke from the pulpit on the mitzva 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 kiddish coordinator; Carol for helping her mother with the kiddishes and David for managing the various teen activities of the shul.

But, of course, the Rabbi was careful to point out that the mitzva of living in Eretz Yisrael was "in the category of a four corner garment, which although not mandatory to wear, if one should do so he would be required to attach to it tzitzit and merit a mitzva. 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 would respond that there have been too many warnings of late that the time has come to go home. So, if not now, then when?

The following day, on Monday, true to Miri's message, the movers arrived at 7:00 AM sharp to take all the worldly possessions of the Levine family to the packing company, and from there to Israel.

Packing was an unforgettable experience. Beth Levine stood wondering how they "succeeded" in 20 years of marriage to accumulate so much "stuff." They began in the attic, which served as a nostalgic trip into the past. Many memories were evoked 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 have sweetened with time.

But life goes on, and with a mental scissors they will be severed in the light of the 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 so 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 about half the work.

A Western Union messenger suddenly 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 2020, to be enforced immediately.

You are ordered to report on May 14, 2020 to the Induction Center at 1948 Independence Ave. 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."

Al handed the telegram to Beth as the phone suddenly 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 b'Nefesh. Good news. Due to last minute unexpected cancellations we have been able to get for you the three ABC seats near the window and the D in the middle. Derech Tze'lei'cha."

A Time for Return

There are two broadly accepted premises within many circles in the galut: that the State of Israel is in great danger, and life in the United States or other places in the galut is secure.

However, the reality is that we in Eretz Yisrael are threatened, but we are not in danger; whereas, the Jews in the galut are not yet threatened but are assuredly in mortal danger.

The Tanach (Melachim 2 chap. 6) relates a story involving Elisha, the protege of Eliyahu HaNavi.

The King of Aram learned that Elisha was in the town of Dotan in northern Shomron, and he sent a huge military force to surround the town with orders to capture Elisha.

The force arrived there at night and waited. In the early morning, Gaichazi, the student of Elisha, went outside and saw that the enemy had completely besieged the town. In desperation, he called out to Elisha, who calmed the young man by saying:

A horizontal sequence of 10 sets of vertical bars. Each set contains 5 bars. The first 9 sets have 5 bars each, while the last set has 4 bars. The bars are gray with white centers.

Do not fear, for there are more on our side than there are on theirs

בְּרוּךְ הוּא יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא בְּרוּךְ הוּא יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא

Elisha prayed to HaShem saying, "Lord, open his eyes (of Gaichazi) so he can see (the surrounding spiritual world)" And HaShem opened his eyes, and he saw the mountain filled with horses and chariots of fire around Elisha

Surrounding Eretz Yisrael are myriads of God's angels protecting the righteous of the land.

Whoever believes that the establishment of the State of Israel, the victories in our impossible wars, and the quality of life we enjoy today are not the result of God's personal intervention, is simply not thinking.

The angels are being overworked in their defense of the Holy Land. After every war, we hear tales of soldiers who swore that angels were driving them on to victory.

By every human standard, the State of Israel should have died in "childbirth" and should certainly not have attained the mature age of 71 years (and most certainly not have the most stable currency in the world, with the dollar dropping daily in favor of the shekel). But we are here in the fulfillment of HaShem's promise that He will return His children to Eretz Yisrael.

This is the "true" reality, as we live now to celebrate the defeat of our enemies and will soon celebrate the modern-day Purim festivals to be established by the Chief Rabbinate.

And what of the reality in the galut, where our fellow Jews view their situation with serenity?

A bit of history:

Upon the establishment of the State of Israel, the gates of the land were thrown open, with the first law to be passed being the Law of Return.

HaShem granted the disbursed of Am Yisrael a period of time to return home, in accordance with Israel's capacity to absorb the returnees.

In its first years, Israel absorbed over a million desperate Jews from Europe and Arab and Moslem lands – a feat unparalleled in all history. And all this in the midst of wars.

In these 71 years, the Land has embraced its returning children, so that today nearly a majority of Jews in the world have arrived home. This, in itself, proves that our generation is the greatest one since the generation that entered the land with Yehoshua bin Nun.

As modern history evolves, we see an increase in the "discomfort level" of Jews in foreign lands.

Many Jews claim that the threat of anti-Semitism is irrational; but the reality of life has taught us that the fabric of society is so fragile that it takes little to turn neighbor against neighbor and friend into foe.

But this thought does not really disturb our brothers and sisters in the galut; because deep in the recesses of the Jewish galut mind is the knowledge that if, God forbid, the situation becomes intolerable, Israel will always be there to take them in. The houses in places like the Five Towns and Lakewood will always be there to sell and finance their return to Israel, if need be.

This, too, is virtual reality.

The idea that you can sell your property and purchase a beautiful home in Eretz Yisrael with money to spare is no longer true. The change in the financial situation in the USA and in Israel has now placed many people who have considered aliyah, to be very very disappointed.

Rambam writes in the Laws of Teshuva that HaShem waits for a period of time for the sinner to return; but if the sinner does respond, HaShem creates a situation in his life that makes doing teshuva a very difficult alternative.

HaShem has given the Jews in the galut a period of time to return to Eretz Yisrael. However, with the passing of time, it will become increasingly difficult to do so, until that tragic moment when HaShem will say AD KAN (no more!) and the gates will be closed.

We pray in the chapter preceding the morning "Shema"

וְלֹא תַּנַּאֲךְ וְלֹא תַּנְאַךְ וְלֹא תַּנְאַךְ

Lead me upright to our land

Meaning: Permit me to return home, not as a poor refugee with only the shirt on my back (as was the case after World War II), but upright in body and spirit, with self-pride and confidence.

There is still time for those who wish to assure their family's spiritual and physical future; but who knows for how long!

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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