

Vayigash 5773

BS"D Parashat Vayigash 5773

On the 5th of Iyar 5708 (May 14, 1948) Mo'e'tzet Ha'am (National Council) met in Tel Aviv to declare the establishment of Medinat Yisrael. The very next day, on the the 6th of Iyar, the armies of seven Arab states invaded the tiny area of Medinat Yisrael. They were in effect saying, "We will give the flame of Medinat Yisrael one day to be lit. Tomorrow we will extinguish it, together with the hopes of the Jewish people to ever return to the land from which God had exiled them".

Today, 64 years later, the Medina with its over 6 million Jews from 100+ countries stands at the cutting edge of human endeavor, while the majority of the 22 Arab states are, in the best case, struggling to remain solvent, or busy killing each other in civil wars.

Sixty four is a natural number for the miracles of Chanuka, because it is the number 8 squared. Eight times 8 years of continuous miracles from the hand of HaShem!

Chanuka is celebrated differently among the widespread communities of our people. In the galut, Jews recall the miracles of our successful rebellion against the Greeks' attempt to extinguish the fire of Torah in their quest to destroy the Jewish nation. But in Eretz Yisrael, Chanuka is forever present in our struggle against the many forces who seek to destroy Medinat Yisrael in their quest to destroy the Jewish nation. We in the Holy land daily relive the challenges which faced our ancestors, only the names of the enemies have changed. Because enemies of God's people fall from the platform of history very quickly, in order to make room for new enemies to try their hand at doing the impossible – destroying the Jewish people.

No longer is ancient Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome or the Phillistines factors in our lives. They have given way to Christianity, Islam, the UN, the European Union, the ICC, and anti-Semites of various colors and tongues. But they too will go the way of all our previous enemies, so we shall begin setting up room for them in the exhibits of our museums.

Chanuka, is the holiday of the Kohanim. The Kohanic family of Mattityahu were the first to raise the flag of rebellion against the Greeks and their Jewish Hellenist corroborators. The Kohanim led the brutal 25 year war, and it was they who lit the oil which burned for 8 days in the kodesh (sanctuary) of the Bet Hamikdash.

On this background, I wish to direct this week's Torah message to my fellow Kohanim who are still living in the galut. Our parasha relates (Beraishiet 47,22):

However, he (Yosef) did not purchase the land of the (Egyptian)+++ priests, because they received a regular allotment from Pharaoh and had food enough from the allotment Pharaoh gave them. That is why they did not sell their land.

From here we learn that the priests were landowners, and Paro saw to it that they retained their homesteads by supplying them with their needs.

In our holy Torah Kohanim and Levi'im were not allotted homesteads, as stated in Devarim 10:8-9

⁸ At that time HaShem set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of HaShem, to stand before HaShem to minister and to pronounce blessings in His name, as they still do today. ⁹ That is why the (tribe of) Levi have no share or inheritance among their fellow Israelites; HaShem is their inheritance, as the Lord your God told Moshe

The tribe of Levi were not awarded land, which would have

occupied the majority of their time and efforts, whereas HaShem desired the Kohanim and Levi'im to be totally dedicated to serving Him.

Every son of Ya'akov, the progenitors of the 12 tribes, was endowed with a unique quality. It is not surprising that the fourth son of Ya'akov, Yehuda, was the brother who came forward in our parasha to challenge the Viceroy of Egypt's belligerent attitude from the first moment the brothers arrived there. Yehuda was endowed with the quality of leadership and initiative indicative of the role which was to be set upon his future descendants as the ruling House of King David. The third son, Levi, was to become the connecting link between HaShem and the Jewish people in the role which was to be set upon his future descendants as Kohanim and Levi'im.

The Jewish nation is Hashem's chosen people, and the Kohanim are His personal emissaries.

There is a natural affinity for spirituality in the Kohanic soul. Kohanim are endowed with zealousness in the defense of the Torah. Pinchas acted as a Kohen when he displayed his zeal for Hashem, and was rewarded with an upgrade from Levi to Kohen. The Kohanim brought down the walls of Yericho, the city known as the "Gateway to Eretz Yisrael".

Despite their relatively small demographic percentage (about 5%), many prophets were Kohanim, i.e., Yirmiyahu, Uriah, Yehoyada, Zecharia, and many more. Ezra the Scribe, who led the rebuilding of the second Bet Hamikdash was the Kohen Gadol, as were the majority of the rabbis in the Sanhedrin chosen from the Kohanic family. The Maccabeim were Kohanim, and the Kohanim fought the Romans to the last man, as the Bet HaMikdash was burning around them.

With the development of DNA analysis, it was discovered that over 80% of people who claim to be Kohanim were found to have a particular factor on their "Y" chromosome, the chromosome

that determines the male gender through which the kehuna is passed on to the next generation.

In the years prior to the destruction of the second Bet Hamikdash, various Sanhedrins decreed that chutz la'aretz was tamei, so that Kohanim would not leave Eretz Yisrael except in certain special circumstances.

With all this in mind, I turn to my fellow Kohanim in chutz la'aretz to remind them of their unique status, which cannot be reconciled with their presence in the galut.

We Kohanim were at the forefront of every religious activity, from earliest times. Thus, it is our obligation to be role models for the nation, requiring our return to the land where the Bet Hamikdash was, and will be once again.

An impressive statistic. In most areas of Eretz Yisrael the Kohanic blessing is recited daily and twice when musaf is said. On Yom Kippur even three times.

That comes out to approximately 400 times a year. Whereas in chutz la'aretz it is recited approximately only 10 times a year. Had I remained (God forbid) in galut, I would have said the Kohanic blessing over the the last 50 years approximately 500 times, whereas in the 50 years of being in Eretz Yisrael I have recited the blessing about 20,000 times! Each time a Kohen recites the blessing he is fulfilling a Torah mitzva.

Our parsha relates that when Yosef and Binyamin embraced, they cried bitterly. And as Rashi explains, it was because they both experienced a prophetic moment. Yosef cried because he saw the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash which were to be built in the tribal area of Binyamin, and Binyamin cried because he saw the destruction of mishkan Shilo (the sanctuary in the town of Shilo) in the area of Yosef.

Many people today, in Eretz Yisrael, are planning and learning all the possible aspects of the Bet Hamikdash. Because, in contrast to Yosef and Binyamin we do not envision destruction;

but rather we see in our minds' eye the rebuilding of the Bet Hamikdash.

It will happen, and could happen very suddenly. And when it does, the Kohanim who will be here will be granted the privilege of serving HaShem in the Mikdash. How embarrassing, to say the least, it will be for the Kohanim who will not be here.

Dear fellow Kohanim,

We have been blessed with a gift that cannot be attained through purchase; the kehuna is an indivisible component of our souls. The kehuna part of you yearns to be re-united with the kedusha of Eretz Yisrael. To turn your back on it is to be your own worst enemy.

Shabbat Shalom

Nachman Kahana

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