

Vayigash 5781

BS"D Parashat Vayigash 5781

Rabbi Nachman Kahana

The Choices We Are Forced To Make

In Bereishiet 43:9, Yehuda declares before his father that he accepts responsibility for Binyamin:

אֲנִי אֶשְׂרֹתוֹ וְיָדִי אֶשְׂרֹתוֹ כִּי-אֵלֶיךָ אֶשְׂרֹתוֹ אֲנִי וְאֵלֶיךָ אֶשְׂרֹתוֹ
אֲנִי אֶשְׂרֹתוֹ-כִּי אֵלֶיךָ אֶשְׂרֹתוֹ

I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him; if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever.

And in chapter 44:18, the Torah relates how Yehuda makes a last desperate plea before Yosef, the Egyptian Viceroy:

אֲנִי אֶשְׂרֹתוֹ אֲנִי אֶשְׂרֹתוֹ אֲנִי אֶשְׂרֹתוֹ אֲנִי אֶשְׂרֹתוֹ אֲנִי אֶשְׂרֹתוֹ אֲנִי אֶשְׂרֹתוֹ אֲנִי אֶשְׂרֹתוֹ

Then Judah approached him and said, 'Please, my lord, let now your servant speak something into my lord's ears, and let not your wrath be kindled against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh.'

It is a fundamental law of creation that HaShem does not coerce people into doing things, because free will is a basic component of humanity. Nevertheless, HaShem lets His will be known by creating situations which cause rational people to make requisite choices.

Pharaoh refused to free the Jewish people, not because HaShem "hardened his heart" to the extent that Pharaoh no longer had no free will in the matter, but rather HaShem brought about specific economic, political, social, personal and religious constraints on freeing the mass of Jewish slaves who were the economic backbone of the nation.

The Jewish people, with Nachshon ben Aminadav at their head, dove into the churning waters of the Red Sea because there was no other choice. The Egyptian army was at their back, the desert closed upon them from the sides and the sea was in front. What choice did they have?

The Hashmonaim, led by Mattityahu and his five sons, had no choice but to kill the Greek officer who was offering up a pig on the altar; and once done, there was no choice but to declare open rebellion on the then superpower of Greece.

So too, Yehuda, had no choice but to put his life in jeopardy when he inappropriately accused the Viceroy of Egypt of unethical conduct. Because HaShem had woven a web of python-like realities, after Yehuda declared before his father that he would accept personal responsibility in this world as well as in the next for the safety of Binyamin.

Yehuda's words to Yosef caused the dramatic collapse of the veil of obscurity that Yosef had placed between himself and the brothers. But it was not Yehuda's emotionally charged delivery which brought Yosef to tears; but rather one single sentence in the stream of words Yehuda was engendering – the revelation that Ya'akov, his father, was still in mourning

over the loss of Yosef. Because in all the years that Yosef served as Viceroy of Egypt, he did not make an effort to contact his father. Why? Perhaps because Yosef suspected his brothers of acting the way they did with their father's consent or even on his initiative. But the moment Yehuda revealed that their father had never ceased mourning, Yosef realized the terrible truth that he had wrongly suspected his father of the unspeakable. This made Yosef understand that he was guilty of the same crime as the brothers; for just as they had suspected him falsely, he too had suspected his father falsely. So, Yosef realized in the end that he was no better than they and saw no justification of punishing them.

To continue with the theme of no choice.

The 650,000 Jews who composed the yishuv in Eretz Yisrael in 1948 had no choice but to declare an independent Jewish state, even against the best advice of our American friends, who immediately placed an arms embargo on the new State. With 600,000 displaced persons languishing in the camps of Europe and a million Jews who were suffering in Moslem countries, what else could they have done? There was no choice.

The United Nations Partition Plan allotted the Jewish State a thin sliver of land along the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, with no chance of survival. So, on the day after declaring the State, five standing armies of Arab States attacked the Medina and we had no choice but to fight. The situation of no choice, which HaShem had created, produced in its wake, the expansion of the State beyond the borders established by the UN.

In 1967, Israel was again threatened with annihilation, when Egypt, Syria and Jordan joined forces to attack us. HaShem again created a no choice situation. At the end of six days of fighting, the land area of the State of Israel had increased threefold, from the Hermon Mountains in the north, to Sharam-Al Sheikh at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula.

At 1:45 on Yom Kippur day 1973 we were forced to leave our shuls to report for duty in order to turn back the tide of possible annihilation, by the joint forces of Egypt and Syria, with the aid of Russia. As expressed by the arch "Achitofel" of our generation, Moshe Dayan, in a comment of despair, hopelessness and desperation he made in a General Staff meeting that leaked out to the press at the beginning of the war: "השלישית תהיה חמיקדש" – "destruction of the third Bet Hamikdash".

Woe to them of little faith. The war ended with Israel 60 kilometers from Damascus and 100 km from Cairo. One of the greatest comebacks in military history.

A situation is now looming whereby Hamas' belligerence in planning to send missiles and mortar fire into our cities will force us to put this Amalekite military force out of its misery – once and for all.

Birkat Hamazon

In the second blessing of the Birkat Hamazon (Grace after Meals) beginning with "Nodeh Lecha", we thank HaShem for six things: The Land of Israel, the exodus from Egyptian bondage, circumcision, the Torah, life, and the food we eat.

Why precisely these six things? Because of their common denominator – all were forced upon the Jewish People against their will.

The Land of Israel: when the generation of the miraglim (scouts) refused to enter the Land.

Exodus from Egyptian bondage: eighty percent of the Jewish People refused to leave Egypt.

Circumcision: is performed without the consent of the child.

The Torah: HaShem held Mount Sinai over the people's heads to ensure they would agree to accept the Torah.

Life: Our sages say, "Perforce you are born" (Pirkei Avot 4:22).

The food we eat: Man's efforts to obtain food place a heavy burden upon him.

The unfortunate fact of human nature is that people are unaware of what is essential for them in the final analysis; certainly, we do not know what awaits us beyond the celestial curtain. HaShem, therefore, forces all of these spiritual gifts upon us like a father insistently educating his children.

The dreadful Holocaust sped up the State's establishment and the arrival of millions of Jews in the Promised Land. The wars since 1948 were all against our will, but they led the Jewish People and the State of Israel to grow and thrive both spiritually and materially.

And so will things be in the Ikveta DeMeshicha, the pre-Messianic era, when the complete redemption is forced upon the Jewish People, who are not sufficiently prepared to understand the meaning of being HaShem's Chosen People.

Freedom of Choice

Right now, before our very eyes, a no-choice situation is developing in the various communities of the galut, where the only choice for a rational, non-suicidal Jew will be to return to Eretz Yisrael.

It will not be a matter of free choice for which one is rewarded in Gan Eden, but simply a matter of HaShem spinning a web of circumstances where the only direction available will be to return home.

Great changes have descended upon the world. Yesterday's realities will be relegated to history books, and we will have to deal with a new set in which Medinat Yisrael will be the fulcrum around which world events revolve, as we see even now.

The sands of time for freedom of choice are running out. To reap the rewards of returning home willingly, one must act with courage and without delay. The difference will be to return home as proud Jews with your wealth and possessions as we say daily before kriyat shema:

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Lead us upright to our land

As opposed to being brought home in a far less dignified manner.

B careful B healthy B here

Remember JLMM Jewish Lives Matter More.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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