



Parashat Behaalotecha 5772 - #236

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On the Haftarah... An Historic Opportunity

[Ashekenazim/Sefardim: Zechariah 2:14-4:7
Yemenite Jews: 2:14-4:9]

The Second Temple Period has many similarities to our period. The words of the prophets of that time reverberate in ours and teach us the path to follow.

"Sing and rejoice, daughter of Zion, for I come and I will dwell in your midst, says Hashem" (Zechariah 2:14).

Together with Chagai and Malachi, Zechariah was one of the last three prophets of the Second Temple Period. Our Sages point out that there are different levels of Ruach Ha-Kodesh (Divine Spirit) and prophecy, and that the prophecy of the Second Temple was at a lower level than during the First Temple (Yoma 9b). But even though the revelation of the Divine Presence was less noticeable during this time, the message that the Redemption of the Nation of Israel was actually occurring was still conveyed. It was time to leave the Exile and return to Eretz Yisrael, and to rejoice over it.

This call came not only from the prophets. It also came from two great leaders: Ezra and Nechemiah. Ezra was a spiritual giant, and according to our Rabbis he was also the prophet Malachi (Megillah 15a). He was called "Malachi" in the realm of prophecy and "Ezra" in the realm of being a sage. He, along with the other Rabbis, fixed the order of the prayers (Rambam, Hilchot Tefillah 1:4). Our Rabbis thought so highly of Ezra that they stated: "Ezra was worthy of having the Torah given through him, but Moshe preceded him" (Sanhedrin 21b). Ezra dedicated his entire life to explaining the Torah and helping it to penetrate into the hearts of the Nation. "For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Torah of Hashem, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel" (Ezra 7:10). He was both a man of spirit and a man of action, who stood at the forefront of the return to Zion.

Ezra called for the Jews of the Exile to make Aliyah with him, but only a small portion of the Nation followed him (Mishneh Kiddushin 4:1). The situation was similar to our period. Despite the many calls to make Aliyah, many Sages did not heed the call, since the return to Zion did not look like the cherished Redemption. Similarly, when the Second Temple was built, Elders who had seen the First Temple in all of its glory, scorned the new structure, which seemed comparatively small and unimpressive (Ezra 3:12). Zechariah was highly critical of this response: "Who scorns the day of lowliness?" (Zechariah 4:10). Our Sages explain: "Who scorns the day of lowliness? Who causes the table (reward) of righteous to be disgraced in the World to Come? It was due to their smallness that they did not trust in Hashem" (Sotah 48b). Rashi explained that "smallness" meant that they were of little faith. Since they had little faith and therefore did not make Aliyah, their reward was lost.

Our Sages relate that one day Reish Lakish, one of the great Rabbis of Eretz Yisrael, was swimming in the Jordan River, which at that time was the border between Eretz Yisrael and the Exile. One of the Sages of Babylonia came along and put out his hand to say "Shalom." Reish Lakish refused to shake it and said: "I hate you Babylonians because you did not make Aliyah!" (Yoma 9b).

In our day as well, many Rabbis and G-d-fearing Jews look negatively upon the events of our time. If only they were able to see the finger of Hashem in this amazing return to Zion, they themselves would make Aliyah, and our spiritual and physical state in Israel would be improved beyond measure. The ancient opposition to Aliyah is rooted in spiritual blindness to the great occurrences of Redemption.

This prophecy applies equally to us. Our Sages inform us that many prophets appeared throughout the ages, but only prophecies that were meant for Jews were recorded (Megillah 14b).

"Sing and rejoice, daughter of Zion, for I come and I will dwell in your midst, says Hashem" (Zechariah 2:14). This verse, which begins our Haftarah, is mentioned by Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Levi, when the King of Kuzar faults the Nation of Israel for failing to make Aliyah. The sage replied: "In truth, you have located the place of my shame, King Kuzar" (Kuzari 2, 24).

Even though they recognized the value of Eretz Yisrael, only a small handful of Jews, forty thousand (Nechemiah 7:26), agreed to forsake their homes and businesses, and leave the Exile (Kuzari *ibid.*). The Sages and the majority of the Nation chose to remain under foreign domination (see Rashi on Kiddushin 69b). Only a small fraction of the Nation responded to the call. "If they had been willing to come close to the G-d of our ancestors with a full heart, then He – the Blessed One – would have redeemed us as He redeemed our ancestors in Egypt" (Kuzari).

Rav Aviner on...
A Political Party of the Entire Jewish People
[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Naso 5772 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Question: While we are not yet in an election period, and the parties are not yet presenting themselves, perhaps this is still the time to take a look far into the future and to think about where we are headed. Obviously, the Torah is our life, the Torah of the individual and the

Torah of the entire nation, and seemingly we've got to direct the country. The simple, natural conclusion is therefore that we have to vote for a religious party. So said Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook in this regard: "I side with whoever is G-d-fearing." More than that, perhaps the time has come for there to be a believer leading the entire Nation, a prime minister who believes in G-d. We cannot imagine what blessing and goodness that would bring. The question, obviously, is this: How do we advance this holy agenda?

Answer: 1. Without a shadow of a doubt, having a believer lead the country would be the ideal, and it is our duty to advance this. The question is: Is the Nation ready for it? After all, all political leadership can be divided into three parts: (1) knowing the present reality, (2) setting one's goal, and (3) establishing a course leading from the reality to the goal, and not just one course, but alternative courses as well.

2. The reality is that the Nation dwelling in Zion does not put its faith in a religious Zionist party. Moreover, about half of the National-Religious public itself likewise does not, choosing instead to vote for other parties. Even though before the elections almost all the National-Religious Rabbis issue a proclamation that we must vote for this party, the public does not follow that path. Not only is the situation not improving, but it is generally regressing. And most of the National-Religious public who vote for their party are far from doing so wholeheartedly – they only vote for this party because they are psychologically incapable of voting for a secular or Charedi party.

3. Although the National-Religious members of the Knesset are fine, upstanding people who do a lot for the Nation, the Torah and the Land – and for that must be greatly admired – even with all of their good intentions, the National-Religious party remains ephemeral. If it continues to be split in two, there is a serious doubt about whether either party will pass the voting threshold. And even if they do pass the threshold, it is not enough for them to be able to make known their ideas of justice and truth, integrity and holiness, Torah and the Land. That is not the question. Such is the job of men of spirit and faith, to exert their blessed influence on the Nation. Rather, the job of a party is a matter of power, numerical power, quantitative power. Power! The Knesset is not a synagogue.

4. Certainly Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook said to vote for a religious party, but we must consider whether he meant even an ephemeral party that is nothing more than a clarion call of truth and justice, without any real power. Certainly the ideal is a National-Religious party, and "I side with whomever is G-d-fearing", all the more so with a precious party which has engraved on its emblem the rebirth of the Nation in its Land according to the Torah. But what does it help us to exalt that party if people don't vote for it in practice? It's like the Jewish People who wanted a king, but when the Prophet Shmuel complained to G-d about his intentions, G-d responded, "Of course you're right, but you can't go against the Nation's wishes." Ha-Rav Naftali Tzi Yehudah Berlin writes along the same lines in his "Ha-Emek Davar" Torah commentary as far as the Mitzvah of "You shall be free to set a king over yourself" (Devarim 17:15), stating that there is a need for the Nation's consent.

True, Rabbenu Ha-Rav Tzvi Yehudah said to vote for a religious party. The question is whether a transient party can still be called a party. Perhaps it isn't big enough to be considered such, since it has no recognizable influence.

5. Indeed, much of the National-Religious public votes for the Likud. And why do they do so? Apparently because this is the party most associated with the whole Jewish People. True, it lacks the great virtue of having the Torah as a lamp unto its feet (hence it is not to my taste). Yet in the existing party landscape, this remains the party most associated with the entire Jewish People. And a small faction within a large party has more power than a small party on its own, even if that small party is totally to my taste.

6. But I must correct the characterization of the Likud as a party devoid of Torah, for that is not really so. As is known, the Torah transcends all the parties. It is associated with the entire Jewish People. It sees the good in all the parties, all of which together are building the house of Israel.

7. Yet I haven't yet answered the first question – why, despite the recommendations of our Rabbis, who engage each time in another battle to bring in their flocks, do those flocks disobey? Why don't they accept what their teachers and Rabbis transmit to them?

What, then, is bothering the National Religious public about its leaders, its political personalities and its Rabbis? It's very simple: they think that their leaders are incapable of leading the Nation. The proof is that they are incapable of leading themselves. After all, they are split in two camps, and each camp is itself divided. That's what that public says, with deep sorrow, and sometimes they add: "It's disgraceful! The public is not blind. It can see very well that its political leadership is quarreling, and, unfortunately, its spiritual leadership as well. They are caught up in base controversies and intrigues." The public therefore does not place its trust in that leadership. The National-Religious-party representation is thus in jeopardy.

8. The National Religious public, which is very precious, and is a serious, hardworking community of believers, finds itself scattered across the political spectrum, with many preferring a party that they view as encompassing the entire Jewish People. Truth be told, these people have a great love of unity, inclusiveness and "Israeliness".

9. Yet we are not giving up. Quite the contrary: we have to take advantage of this very bad crisis in order to rise higher and higher. There is a cure. A simple, remarkable, well-known cure: We should hold a general election to choose the chairman, Knesset members and central committee members of a single National Religious Party – one party that is large and general. The elections should be direct elections without any obstacles or tricks. It's a long time now since the public has had faith in its leadership. It is afraid. It doesn't rely on them. It is very afraid of the politicians. That is the solution. There is no other. Otherwise, there is a danger that everything will deteriorate and wither away. If we follow this path, there is great hope of rebirth. Our leadership mustn't stand aloof from its holy flocks. Rather, it must serve them faithfully, for the sake of heaven.

Rav Aviner in the News...

Draft Charedim to Military or National Service

[www.theyeshivaworld.com/news/General+News/129046/Rabbi-Aviner%3A-Draft-Chareidim-to-Military-of-National-Service.html]

"The Charedim err regarding military service. Little-by-little, however, this error is ending", states Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, a prominent Posek in the Dati Leumi community.

Rabbi Aviner was speaking to students about the Plesner Committee, with the latter being the government committee that is working to legislate the law that will replace the Tal Law, simply defining the new reality for citizens of Israel regarding military or national service, primarily directed at Charedim and Arabs.

"The army is our common denominator and we mustn't lose this" added the Rav.

Rabbi Aviner told his Talmidim that the Charedim are good people, people who are Moser Nefesh in their Avodat Hashem, but regarding this particular matter they are not correct.

The Rav believes in bringing Charedim into the fold of sharing the burden via IDF or national service. He feels this can be accomplished while providing them an atmosphere in line with their Hashkafah as well as inducting them into a military service after their complete their studies, prior to joining the workforce.

"Tzahal is Am Yisrael and it is the single largest common denominator we have. We mustn't lose this" the Rav concluded.

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