

**A 'NEDER' [VOW] IN TIMES OF TROUBLE
& the Haftara for Shabbat Chazon**

I noticed a news item this week that continues to bother me, and I wanted to share my thoughts with you, this Shabbat before Tisha be-Av - at this most difficult time in our history.

The link to the full story I refer to can be found at this link:
<http://www.israelnationalnews.com/news.php3?id=87214>

The article titled: '**Conditional Mass Vow: No Expulsion, Lots of Good Deeds**' - quotes 'promotional literature' encouraging 'tens of thousands' to take upon themselves the following commitment:

"If G-d comes to our aid and to the aid of all Israel, and preserves us during these times of tribulation as the sword of destruction and expulsion is lifted against us, and saves us and gives us the areas of our Land and inheritance in Gush Katif and northern Shomron, with their communities and residents - men, women and children ...

Then, we, men, women and youth, commit without a vow to dedicate part of our time on behalf of the Land of Israel and the Nation of Israel according to the Torah of Israel once/twice/three times a month for the course of a year."

Among the recommended activities are those **on behalf of national social justice according to the spirit and vision of the Torah and the prophets....** educational and Torah activities; face-to-face activities with other Jews for the purpose of bringing them closer to G-d, Judaism and the Land of Israel; and kindness to the sick, elderly and others.

"And thus we will thank, praise and sanctify G-d for His salvation," the organizers conclude.

At first glance, this sounded like a wonderful initiative, but when I read the "nusach" carefully, it appeared to me as a terrible misunderstanding of a key theme in the Bible, as articulated by the rebuke of great prophets such as Yeshayahu and Yirmiyahu.

Maybe I misunderstood this vow, but it sounds to me like:

IF God helps us keep our land...

THEN we will dedicate ourselves to doing social justice...

While in fact, all the prophets say exactly the opposite, i.e.

IF we, the nation of Israel, keep social justice ["tzedeq u-misphat"]

THEN - God will help us keep the land of Israel

[and if we don't, we may lose the land He gave us; until we learn our lesson, and are ready to return]

As you read this week's Haftara from Yeshayahu chapter one, you'll see how obvious this point is. Note especially 1:16-27, note also 1:10-15 in light of Breishit 18:17-22.

[See also our TSC shiur on Parshat Vayera, and some additional sources, see Yeshayahu 5:1-10, 10:1-5, 11:1-5. Yirmiyahu 7:1-7, 9:22-23, 22:1-5, 23:5-6, and Zecharya 7:8-14, 8:16-19; just to quote a few of hundreds more.]

GOD'S CONDITIONAL PROMISE

Surely, God promised the Land of Israel to our forefathers in Sefer Breishit with "brit Avot" - but God also qualified that promise at "brit Sinai" - repeating over and over again that we keep this land **ONLY** if we remain worthy, but should we not follow His mitzvot - we would suffer calamity, and possibly lose the land.

In fact, we clearly make this statement in our daily kriyat shema - see Devarim 11:16-17. See also Shmot 23:20-22, Vayikra 18:24-30, 26:3-37, Bamidbar 14:21-23, and Devarim 6:1-3, 8:7-20, 11:22-23, 28:1-68, 29:22-27, 32:19-22 etc.

If you review these sources, you'll see how this emerges as one of the primary themes of the Bible - that even though our

destiny with the land is eternal, how we fare on that land (as a nation) becomes a direct function of our deeds (as a nation). This theme also makes sense, as God's promise of the Land to Avraham Avinu was towards the goal of establishing a model nation that would properly represent Him (see Devarim 4:5-8). As all of the prophets reiterate, should Am Yisrael do a poor job of representing God, He will ultimately take the land away from them, until they are ready again. [See the sources noted above.]

Accordingly, someone who **believes in God**, will blame himself when calamity befalls the nation.

Someone who **believes in himself**, will blame others.

YAAKOV AVINU'S 'CONDITIONAL VOW'

The article quoted above, also notes a precedent for 'making a vow in times of peril' from Yaakov Avinu, quoting Midrash Rabbah - that Jacob's vow set the stage for Jews throughout the generations to make similar vows, as the ruling cited in Shulchan Arukh, "During times of tribulation, it is permitted to vow."

True, Yaakov Avinu's vow 'sets the stage' - but pay careful attention to what Yaakov's vow was all about. Recall how God appeared unto Yaakov at Bet-El - at the very same site where Avraham had built a "mizbeiach" - and 'made a name for God' ["kriya be-shem Hashem, see Breishit 12:8 and Ramban].

At that time, Yaakov would have loved to continue in the footsteps of his father and grandfather - to make a Name for God in the Land of Israel, but due to his predicament he was unable - for he was a fugitive, running away from Esau and the land. After God assures Yaakov that He will oversee his safe return, Yaakov vows that **IF** (or when) God fulfills that promise [that he return home to the land] - **THEN** he will build a House for God, and dedicate his life to that goal. [See Breishit 28:10-22 and our TSC shiur on Parshat Vayetze - where we explained that vow in detail.]

But note how different Yaakov's vow was - than the vow suggested to be made in the above article. Yaakov vows to do something that **HE CANNOT DO** at the present time, because of his current predicament. Should God help him overcome that predicament, and bring him back safely to the land, that will allow him to do what he wanted to do all along - i.e. to work for God and build Him a Bet-Elokim. However, any mitzvah that Yaakov could keep as a fugitive, he continues to keep - it is only the mitzvot **that he cannot keep** because he is a fugitive, that he promises to keep should/when God brings him safely home.

Similarly, when Bnei Yisrael are attacked in the desert by the King of Arad, they make a vow - that should God help them win that battle - they will dedicate its booty of those Canaanite cities to God. [See Bamidbar 21:1-3.] Note again, the vow is only something that they cannot do now, but can only do should God help them win that battle.

But to vow to perform mitzvot that can be kept even if we [chas ve-shalom] lose Gush Katif, **ON THE CONDITION** that God helps us keep Gush Katif - in my humble opinion seems antithetical to Yaakov's vow, and to what Chumash is all about - especially in relation to the mitzvot of "tzedeq u-mishpat"!

AN 'UNCONDITIONAL VOW' & PRAYER

I may have misunderstood the article, but I surely hope that everyone would agree that our commitment to perform acts of "tzedeq u-mishpat" - to the best of our abilities - should be totally UNCONDITIONAL, no matter what decision God reaches in regard to Gush Katif.

Instead, I'd suggest that we pray to God that for the sake of our unconditional commitment to keeping His mitzvot - especially those of social justice, that He have mercy upon His people and create some political 'miracle' whereby we can remain in Gush Katif. But should that miracle not happen - we must remain no less committed to our Torah values.

Let us vow to unconditionally strive to keep [and balance] all Torah values - to become a nation worthy of God's Providence so that He allow us to grow and prosper in the 'Land of Israel' - through 'true righteousness', and not 'self-righteousness'.

sh'nizke l'geulah v'yeshuah,
menachem