

Hilulat HaRav Ya'akov Abuhatzeira, z"l

Sunday, the 20th of Tevet, 5784

The Moment Before Dawn:

A Time to Return

HaRav Pinchas Eliyahu Abuhatzeira

I want to begin¹ by taking note of that which it is impossible to begin without speaking of - the current awful plight of Klal Yisrael. As we sit here, the war rages on: we shall try to be worthy of the protection of the merit of HaRav Ya'akov, z"l, and we pray for those who are currently at the front, risking their lives in the constant danger that surrounds them; we think of the tens of thousands of families that are always glancing at their phones, never knowing what awful news the next message may bring them. We are here now not because we are, *chas v'shalom*, complacent, out of touch with the troubles of others, and just want to have a good time.² We have rather come here because we want to arouse the merit of the *tzaddik*, that he might intercede on our behalf at the Throne of Glory, and awaken Heavenly mercy, so that Hashem will bring

¹ I want to single out my dear friend, who truly does a lot for Klal Yisrael - day and night - R. Elimelech Firer, for blessing. In the merit of all his amazing efforts, may Hashem repay him, measure for measure, and ensure that no illness or disease should come to his household, and may he continue to merit to be an effective agent for good for Klal Yisrael.

I also would like to mention my dear friend, the mayor of Netivot, Yehiel Zohar, who really does so much for the residents of Netivot, and for the great deal of Torah study that goes on there. A lot of what he has done is in honor and in memory of the Baba Sali, z"l, and I have no doubt that this is an enduring merit for him. May it be Hashem's will that the merit of the one in whose honor we are gathered here - HaRav Ya'akov, z"l, should stand for him, and he should merit great success, *b'ezrat Hashem*.

And of course, I would like to extend blessings to all of the dear guests who are here, כל אחד לפי כבודו, ומעלתו, *each one according to his honor and virtue*.

² Last night, after Shabbat, someone asked if he could consult me about a "promising business idea." I asked him what he meant by this, and he told me that he had been paying attention to the growing number of amputees in hospitals, and he realized that he could make a lot of money from getting involved in supplying prosthetics. Naturally, I was deeply disturbed, and I told him so. If he had told me that he wanted to help people, it would have been easier for me to talk about this; but it is deeply disturbing to hear someone say: 'I want to make money by selling prosthetics to amputees.' No one should be thinking of amputees as a 'business opportunity.'

an end to these troubles, and we will merit the true, complete Redemption, and all our pain and suffering may come to an end.³

This is a difficult time. So many of us cannot process, and cannot understand why we find ourselves in this situation; but the believing Jew never for a second questions Hashem's judgment, but asks only what He wants from us, what message He wants us to receive. On the other hand, we must pray with true devotion, and try to rouse Heavenly mercy, and awaken the merit of our forefathers, "the slumberers of Chevron," the holy *Avot*, to intercede on our behalf before the Throne of Glory. Our goal is to invoke their merit, beseeching their assistance in our quest for a complete redemption and solace.

Today also marks the beginning of *Shovavim*, a period of profound spiritual significance. This period starts as we begin the weekly readings of Sefer Shemot, and spans the six weeks that correspond to the first six *parashiyot* of this book: Shemot, Va'era, Bo, Beshalach, Yitro, and Mishpatim. This alignment forms the acronym "*Shovavim*." During leap years, such as the current one, the period extends to "*Shovavim Ta"t*," including two additional portions, Terumah and Tetzaveh, thereby encompassing eight weeks.⁴

The Shelah explains that the period of *Shovavim Ta"t* arises naturally from these specific *parashiyot* because of the themes they represent: the cathartic nature of suffering, the power of true repentance, the examples of devotion in performing *mitzvot*, engaging in charity and passionate prayer. All these themes, if we only allow ourselves to reflect and properly engage with them, have the power to inspire and awaken us to repent and hold back from sin. And as we know from the Tanach and Chazal, "מְהַרְסֶיךָ וּמְחַרְבֶיךָ מֵאַיִן יֵצְאוּ" - *those who destroy you come from you*" (Yeshayahu 49:17), and, "תִּיסָרְךָ רָעָתְךָ" - *your evil will afflict you*" (Yirmiyahu 2:19), our troubles and torments

³ Tonight, joining our gathering is a truly remarkable person, Meir Tudjman. Just two months ago, Meir experienced an unimaginable loss of the murder of his son. Although he is in the year of *avelut*, I felt it important for Meir to be among us, surrounded by community and compassion. Let us extend our heartfelt prayers for comfort and strength to him. May Hashem grant Meir solace in his time of grief. And let us hope that his son, David, now departed, advocate for his family and for all of Klal Yisrael in the heavenly realms.

⁴ Incredibly, despite its importance, the writings of the Arizal are the first to discuss it extensively; other early sources are less forthcoming, with little discussion of its mystical importance. Indeed, this shows just how deeply this tradition is rooted in the most profound mysteries of the Torah.

can ultimately be traced back to our own imperfection. Through the power of this repentance, *b'ezrat Hashem*, may we quickly merit to experience the final, true Redemption.

This evening, I'd like to share insights from HaRav Ya'akov, z"l, on the Parasha, as his Hilulah is tonight, and may the learning of his teachings stand for our good, as we know that the dissemination of the Torah of a *tzaddik*, evokes his merit in the heavens.⁵ As I scoured his writings, I tried to look for something particularly relevant to the difficult times we are currently facing.

In this week's Parashah, Moshe emerges from his cloistered upbringing in Pharaoh's palace and sees, for the first time, the heavy burden of slavery that his brethren had to bear. Moshe, Chazal tell us, was tormented by the question of "why?" Moshe was deeply tormented by the fact that his people were so terribly oppressed, and questioned what they could have possibly done which could bring them to such a state.

It was not long before he found his answer. When he first came out, and found an Egyptian beating a fellow Hebrew, he saved the man by employing a Divine Name to strike the Egyptian dead. Yet the very next day, he came out again. This time, he saw something far more tragic: two Hebrews fighting with each other. When he tried to remonstrate with the aggressor, the man retorted (2:14): "מִי שָׂמָךְ לְאִישׁ שָׂר וְשֹׁפֵט עָלֵינוּ הֲלֹהֵרִגְנִי?" – *Who put you in charge? Are you threatening to kill me, like you killed that Egyptian?*

The Torah tells us of Moshe's reaction: וַיִּירָא מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֲכֵן נֹדַע הַדָּבָר, *and Moshe was afraid, and said: So the matter is known*. Rashi cites the Midrash to explain what Moshe's fears were: דאג לו על שראה בישראל רשעים דלטורין, אמר מעתה שמא אינם ראויין להגאל וכו' נודע לי הדבר שהייתי

⁵ HaRav Yaakov's mastery of Torah was incredible; כל רז לא אניס ליה – *no secret escaped him*; it is a daunting matter, to speak of his greatness, which we can scarcely describe. A journey through his writings, such as *'Pituchei Chotam*,' reveals his mastery over both the esoteric and exoteric aspects of Torah. He adeptly navigated through *Derash*, *Pilpul*, and the Halacha, leaving a rich legacy in his varied texts. Unfortunately, some of his works have been lost, but the ones that remain are a testament to his scholarly prowess. We are fortunate that our uncle, HaRav David, *shlita*, has dedicated himself to editing and publishing these works, making them accessible to a wider audience. They have recently added further aids in understanding HaRav Yaakov's complex works, and gives all the opportunity to learn from his Torah,

- *He was worried because he saw evil tale-bearers among Klal Yisrael, and said: Perhaps they are not worthy of redemption... "So the matter is known" - ...the matter that had bewildered me, "What sin set Klal Yisrael apart from all the seventy nations to be oppressed with harsh labor?" - But now I see that they are deserving of this.* The sin of *Lashon haRa*, Moshe perceived, was sufficient cause to keep Klal Yisrael enslaved in Egypt and prevent their redemption.

Moshe's reaction here is echoed in his words later in the Parashah, when Hashem first asks him to go demand the nation's freedom from Pharaoh. His first response (3:11) contained two objections: *מי אנכי כי אלה אל-פרעה וְגַי אֹצִיא אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם*, *Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should take Klal Yisrael out of Egypt?* The first objection was self-directed: Moshe did not believe that he was worthy of such a lofty task. But according to Rashi, the second objection reflected a devastating skepticism of whether Klal Yisrael had really merited this redemption: *מה זכו ישראל שתעשה להם נס ואוציאם ממצרים*, *what did Klal Yisrael merit that You shall perform a miracle for them, and I should lead them out of Egypt?*

More devastating still is Hashem's response (3:12): *בְּהוֹצִיאֶךָ אֶת-הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים*: *עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה*, *When you take the nation out of Egypt, you shall all serve Hashem on this mountain.* Rashi explains what this means: *וששאלת מה זכות יש לישראל שיצאו ממצרים, דבר גדול*, *And as to what you inquired: What merit do Klal Yisrael have to enable them to leave Egypt? I have a great return in mind for this investment, because they shall accept the Torah on this mountain three months after they leave Egypt.*

As it seems to emerge from Rashi, Klal Yisrael had little case to make for why they were deserving of redemption. Indeed, Hashem acknowledged this, and described His willingness to save them as an "investment." Hashem was willing to take us out because of what He knew we would become, and what we would later do. Clearly, there was something gravely wrong with Klal Yisrael's spiritual state in Egypt.

Moshe's next question is more cryptic: *הֲיֵהָ אֲנֹכִי בָאֵל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֵל-לִי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם*, *Suppose I come to Bnei Yisrael, and say to them, 'the G-d of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His Name?' What*

should I tell them?” To understand this question, we must explain two things – what the request for Hashem’s Name means, and what Moshe felt that he could not address about it.

Hashem’s response to this raises some further questions. Hashem first tells Moshe that His Name is אֶ-הָיְהוָה אֲשֶׁר אֶ-הָיְהוָה (lit. *I shall be as I shall be*), and then repeats: כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם, *Tell this to Bnei Yisrael: אֶ-הָיְהוָה (I shall be) has sent me to you.*⁶ What does this mean – did Moshe, the greatest of the prophets, not know this Name of Hashem, and its significance? And what would it mean to Klal Yisrael?

HaRav Yaakov, *szl*, explains that Moshe did not think that Klal Yisrael would believe that he was truly Hashem’s emissary, because of the tradition (Bereshit 15:13) that their enslavement would last 400 years. The question, “What is His Name?” refers to the idea that Hashem’s Seal is אמת, *Truth* (Shabbat 55a), and they would refuse to believe that Hashem would promise one outcome and bring another, as much as they surely desired to be redeemed from Egypt.

Hashem’s response was אֶ-הָיְהוָה אֲשֶׁר אֶ-הָיְהוָה. The Name אֶ-הָיְהוָה has the numerical value of 21; the word אֶ-הָיְהוָה can be read as both idea and number, *21 of 21*, or 21 times 21, which equals 441, the numerical value of אמת, *Truth*. This suggests a more nuanced understanding of Truth when it is complemented with mercy: The idea that the “truth” of four hundred years of suffering was subject to different outcomes, because the “truth” that lay at its foundation depended on how it was manifested. Hashem’s earlier promise of “I will be governing the world in this way” depended on how it could be implemented, and on the way the world responded to His promise. Thus, when the Egyptians acted more viciously than the decree had intended, other ways of understanding “four hundred years of suffering” could be considered; “four hundred years’ worth of suffering” did not have to be limited to a more narrow understanding of Divine freedom. “I will be” can become “I will be the way I will be”, the future

⁶ Rashi explains this seeming repetition as a further dialogue between Hashem and Moshe. Hashem had originally told Moshe to assure Klal Yisrael that He would be with them during their trouble, just as He would be with them during their future ordeals when they would be subject to other oppressors in the future. Moshe objected that this would be inappropriate: וְזוֹ צָרָה אַחֲרֵת דַּיִם בְּצָרָה זוֹ, *Why should I mention [future] troubles, do they not have enough trouble with their current ordeal?* Moshe did not want to come to redeem Klal Yisrael and, at the same time, inform them that further hardship lay ahead. Hashem agreed, and told him to say only “אֶ-הָיְהוָה”, I shall be with them in their present torment.

implementation modified according to how we respond to the framework which Hashem creates around us.

There is an incredible lesson for us here: Hashem does not simply decide how history will look and leave. The idea of א-היה אשר א-היה is Hashem's continual involvement in history, responding to the choices we make and the actions we take. We need to maintain an open mind, and avoid the trap of believing that the future is not in our hands. Our merits and efforts have an enormous impact on how, ultimately, the initial decree can look in the real world.

The Midrash (Shemot Rabbah 2:2) tells us that Hashem decided to exalt Moshe to the task of redeemer and leader when He saw his devotion to the sheep he was herding, caring for each one according to its needs and going well out of his way to ensure the safety and wellbeing of them all. The depth of Moshe's love and care for his flock showed how appropriate a choice he was to lead Hashem's children with merciful care as well. Yet the critical reader should ask - where was this mercy now, in Moshe's attempt to avoid the task? Shouldn't this mercy have motivated him to accept the task, even if it would be difficult, even if he believed himself unworthy, even if he would encounter resistance?

Last week,⁷ we spoke of how strange it seems that Yaakov Avinu assembled his sons to his deathbed, seemingly to bless them all, and then suddenly unloads on the behavior of his oldest three children, and seems to punish them instead of blessing them. We mentioned the observation of Avodat Yisrael, that a *Hester Panim*, a Divine "turning away" from us, can be discerned from Bereshit 40:1 until Bereshit 49:18, ("לִישְׁעָתָהּ קָנִיתִי" – "לִי-הִנָּה", in Yaakov's blessing of Dan), where the Divine four-letter Name, the שם הויה, is not used; Hashem is instead referred to as א-להים or א-ל ש-ד, both Names that relate to the Attribute of Justice. We spoke about the need to find Hashem even through that *Hester Panim*, to see His loving mercy even in the most difficult days of torment and exile.

⁷ (I'd like to take a minute here to talk of the inspiration I draw from the people who attend my weekly shiur. Each week I work hard to prepare, and I struggle through many difficult questions and discussions and questions that seem difficult to resolve. Inevitably, when I come to speak, the inspiration from those who make the effort to attend - despite the difficulty of schedule, work, and so many other pressures of life - and the merit of the public gathering to hear Torah helps me clarify those thoughts and brings fresh insights to share.)

We spoke, too, of the cryptic Gemara (Pesachim 56a), which tells us that the Shechinah left Yaakov when he attempted to “reveal the end of days”, and how his sons reassured him with the declaration of “*Shema Yisrael*”, the affirmation of Hashem’s unity, and how Yaakov responded with the grateful praise: “בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְבוֹד מְלְכוּתוֹ לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד”, *Blessed is the Name of the glory of His kingdom forever.*” We explained that the Shechinah’s departure was not a sign of punishment or unworthiness, but that it was a symbol of the necessity for *Hester Panim* to purify us and enable us to strengthen our faith and devotion, which will ultimately birth the final Redemption. The *Hester Panim* becomes, in itself, a sort of Divine Revelation: Hashem makes His Presence known through His very absence.

Can there be any greater *Hester Panim* than that which occurred to us on Simchat Torah? I have heard from reliable sources that there were clear and acute intelligence signs and warnings that Hamas was preparing for an attack in the coming hours, yet the people in charge were unable to process their significance: they saw it as something to deal with in a few hours, not a cause to drop everything and prepare. Everything was as clear as it needed to be – in fact, a senior officer told me that “Protective Edge happened because of similar warning signs.” Yet no efforts were made to prepare. Why? There can be nothing clearer: this should not be regarded as a military failure, but a pure blindness with which Hashem struck us and enabled our enemies to carry out their cruel plans.

Can we explain precisely why He caused this to happen? We know nothing of His plans, but this we can say with certainty: Hashem’s Presence and mighty hand stand out ever so clearly in these events, from His very absence on that day. We can see Him even through the very magnitude of the tragedy, the number of the dead, the masses of injured, the survivors who are in such dire need of Heavenly mercy, the soldiers in first flower of their youth who are forced to face situations we cannot begin to think of. Yet through it all, we cannot lose sight of the crucial message of Yaakov’s sons, their resilience and determination in the face of the descending darkness: the pain, the *Hester Panim* is not a punishment, it is not Hashem striking at us with a vengeance. It is something through which we may emerge stronger than before, with a reinforced faith and resolve to continue serving Hashem.

Yosef's brothers had learned this lesson through their own experience. The sale of Yosef had been carried out because the brothers failed to recognize Hashem's plan, as manifested in Yosef's dreams, and they had attempted to sell him into slavery to overcome the wrong they saw. For 22 years - long years of *Hester Panim* - it seemed that they had succeeded, that Yosef would remain nothing but a footnote of history. Then in a single moment of revelation, the floor was pulled from beneath them, and they met Yosef as king, with his dreams completely fulfilled through their very efforts. As the Midrash (Bereshit Rabbah 93:10) there records: "Abba Cohen Bardela said, 'Woe to us for the Day of Judgment! Woe to us for the Day of Retribution! Consider Yosef, the youngest of his brothers, yet they were unable to stand up to his rebuke. When Hashem Himself rebukes each of us according to our standing, how much more so [will we be unable to bear it]?'"⁸

The key insight here lay in Yosef's reassurance to them (Bereshit 50:20): וַאֲנִי וְהַשָּׂבָתִים עָלַי וְרַעָה אֶל-לֵהִימ הַשָּׂבָה לְטוֹבָה. *you had planned it to be bad for me, but Hashem planned it for good.* Yosef recognized that even in the apparently worst situations, Hashem had always been at work, pulling the strings of history to bring it to the best possible conclusion.

What Yosef was telling the brothers was that, in a sense, they had been right all along. At the time that they sold him, he had fallen short of the lofty estate his dreams had promised. His dreams, despite their prophetic aspect, could have remained just that - dreams; and had he not purified himself through suffering - had he not taken his experiences to heart, and maintained his extraordinary spiritual fortitude and resilience, and emerged with his faith and righteousness intact - he could never have achieved the greatness he did, because true greatness can emerge only through the crucible of challenge and stress.

⁸ As we have explained, the brothers had never questioned the correctness of Yosef's sale. They believed their actions were completely justified, even necessary, and in accord with the judgment of Heaven - as we see from the fact that they included Hashem in their quorum of ten for the ban on speaking of the sale (Tanchuma, Vayeshev, 2). Indeed, the main problem with what they had done was not their identification of the problem, nor the need for action, which was mandated by their perception of the situation. The issue was the way in which they had executed it, as they lamented (Bereshit 42:21): אָכַל אֲשָׁמִים אֲנַחְנוּ עַל-אֲחֵינוּ אֲשֶׁר רָאִינוּ צָרַת נַפְשׁוֹ בְּהַתְחַנְּנוּ אֵלֵינוּ וְלֹא שָׁמְעֵנוּ [in] that we saw the torment of his soul as he pleaded with us, yet we did not listen...

This is the meaning of Abba Cohen Bardela's exclamation: We can be convinced of our righteousness, our correctness, and we can explain everything to ourselves for so many years, and suddenly, when we stand in the floodlights of the Truth, we suddenly discover the flaws that we had covered over.

There are no clear answers to the question of suffering and Divine justice. As my father used to say, “Those who know do not speak, and those who speak do not know.” We have no prophets who can tell us, “This happened because of this, and this happened because of this.” We can only say that a time like this calls for strengthening our faith and calling ourselves to humility, repentance, and good deeds. Yosef’s brothers had experienced the clarity of the Divine plan before, after their own long period of darkness; this enabled them to later confront the coming *Hester Panim* and say: We do not know what its purpose is, and we do not know when or how exactly it will end, but we do know that there is such a Plan, laid by Hashem’s infinite Wisdom and Mercy.

I wish to return to Yaakov’s response to their declaration of faith - בְּרוּךְ שֵׁם כְבוֹד מְלֻכּוֹתָיו - לְעוֹלָם וָעֶד. What did this mean? Yaakov was suddenly able to perceive Hashem’s glory ascendant even in what his sons still only perceived as despair. In Tehillim, the 22nd Psalm, a passionate prayer of faith and hope in the face of despair, is headlined: לְמַנְצָה עַל-אֲזִילַת הַשַּׁחַר, *For the Conductor, over the Ayelet ha-Shachar*. The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim 685:2) expounds on the meaning of these words: לְמַנְצָה לְמִי שֶׁהוּא קוֹפֵץ כְּאֵיל וּמְאִיר לְעוֹלָם בְּשַׁעַת חֹשֶׁךְ, *for the Conductor - for the One Who leaps like a hart (Ayal) and brings light to the world (Shachar, morning) when it is dark*. The Midrash explains that the verse refers to the darkest moment of the night, just before the first light of dawn, when the moon is gone and the stars continually sink beneath the horizon. It is just then, when the world reaches its darkest point, that the first rays of the sun begin to appear.

I am no military expert or commentator, and, especially in light of the current situation, it’s difficult to filter through the multitude of often conflicting information and analysis to find the truth. However, I recently had a conversation with someone whom I hold in high esteem, who believed or hypothesized that the terrorists were plotting a coordinated attack on Israel from three directions - the south, north, and the Yehuda and Shomron regions. According to this theory, the southern group prematurely initiated their attack, failing to synchronize with the others. This error might have inadvertently averted a simultaneous, multi-front attack. While I can’t confirm this information, it certainly goes to show just how much we may have avoided. The thought of such a terrifyingly coordinated plan, and that it may have been narrowly averted, can provide us with something to grasp - a ray of hope, that as bad

as things may seem, as awful as the punishment may seem, we were spared something far worse.⁹

Emulating Hashem's compassion and empathy is a foundational aspect of our faith. We learn from our tradition that Hashem sympathizes with the struggles of Israel, setting a model for us to emulate. It is our sacred duty to empathize and share in the pain of our fellow Jews, including recognizing the sacrifices of soldiers defending Israel. Our prayers for their success and safety are not just a duty but a heartfelt expression of solidarity.

This principle is exemplified in a story I often share about the Chafetz Chaim. At a gathering of distinguished Gedolim, he chose to discuss the importance of Shabbat observance. His students, surprised by this choice of topic for an audience already diligent in Shabbat observance, later inquired about it. The Chafetz Chaim responded that even minor lapses in our observance can influence the broader world's approach to Shabbat. This insight goes beyond Shabbat, teaching us that our actions have a profound global impact. We must therefore find the means to strengthen our dedication - in prayer, Torah study, and our *middot*, as this will ultimately stand for us.

Tomorrow, I will speak at a memorial for Yonatan Malka, ז"ל, from Be'er Sheva, whose life was cut short tragically. His father attends the weekly Shiur. Yonatan, a devoutly observant young man dedicated to Torah and *Mitzvot*, left yeshiva at the start of the war, when he heard of the horrors, to serve in the military. He was stationed in a tank at the front, and also was under the Iron Dome, he symbolized our peak security efforts. Yet, a terrorist exploited a tiny vulnerability in the tank area, striking him directly in the heart.

⁹ It reminds me of what Megaleh Amukot writes about the deaths of Nadav and Avihu: that this incident was of great kindness and compassion by Hashem, because not only Nadav and Avihu, but Aaron and Itamar, too, were initially destined for the same fate after the Golden Calf. However, Hashem's mercy was shown by sparing Aaron and Itamar, offering a deeper understanding of the event. While the demise of Nadav and Avihu is a tragedy, this interpretation introduces a more compassionate aspect of the divine decision - the preservation of others. It highlights an essential truth: certain elements of the divine plan are beyond our grasp, where perceived severity is intertwined with inherent mercy.

Yonatan's story poignantly reminds us that while we strive for maximum protection, absolute safety is an illusion. Ultimately, all lies in Hashem's hands. Our human efforts, however advanced, are never foolproof.

The Torah (Shemot 34:24) gives us an incredible guarantee with regard to עליה לרגל, the thrice-yearly mandatory pilgrimage to Yerushalayim, which teaches us a profound lesson about Hashem's protection. The Torah writes: וְלֹא-יִהְיֶה אִישׁ אֶת-אֶרְצְךָ בְּעֹלְתְךָ לְרֹאוֹת לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ וְגו' וְגו' אֶת-פְּנֵי יְ-הוָה אֵל-הָיִךְ וְגו' *no man will covet your land when you ascend to be seen before Hashem...* Hashem promises a unique form of protection in return for this mitzvah: Not that our fields will become miraculously impregnable, but that *no one will covet them*. They will not be overrun because He will not give them the desire to. I believe that this provides a crucial template for us during this time: we must place our full confidence in Hashem's guardianship and protection. This does not always mean that the balance of forces should be heavily in our favor, but perhaps that He will strike fear in the hearts of our enemies so they will have no desire to attack.

This year's Hilulah is smaller than that of past years. I was reluctant to make a large celebration, and only sent out a handful of invitations; much of the preparations for the event we currently see were planned in the last week, because so many people came to me at *kabalat kahal* and requested that we make it.

But I was reluctant to do this; I was wrestling with the dilemma: is it fitting to hold a Hilulah during such challenging times, particularly amidst war? Those who came at the Kabbalat Kahal expressed a collective need for *chizuk*, a bit of joy, and spiritual resilience. Moved by the community's genuine desire, I agreed to proceed with the event, albeit at the last moment.

But even as we come together to celebrate this Hilulah, if the purpose is for *chizuk*, then, as Yaakov told his sons, we must do it right: we must hold fast to this vital opportunity for further introspection and reflection. This gathering should be a critical platform for spiritual fortification, to renew our genuine inner desire to do good, offering us the means to navigate these difficult times with renewed faith and inner strength. And in the merit of all this, may the merit of haRav Yaakov, too, stand for us, so that Hashem should bring true salvation to Klal Yisrael, and healing and hope and for all those who are still suffering from injury or despair.