PARASHAS VAYEITZEI     TORAH LISHMAMH I

Yaakov departed from Beer-Sheva and went to Charan (28:10).
Rashi asks: Why did the Torah have to note the departure of Yaakov from Beer-Sheva, a fact which had already been mentioned earlier (28:5)? He answers that “this teaches that the departure of a tzaddik from a place makes an impression. When the tzaddik is in the city, he is its glory, its splendor, and its beauty. When he departs, its glory, splendor, and beauty depart with him.”

This Rashi requires explanation. What role did Yaakov play in Beer-Sheva that his departure was so acutely felt? Was he the rav of the city, whose leaving would have been felt, because a city without a rav is like an orphan without a father? Was he involved in kiruv (outreach) or did he run a major chesed organization which offered free meals and lodging like his grandfather, Avraham Avinu? If Avraham left a town, his departure would be felt and his presence missed, because that would have adversely affected the great influence he had on the inhabitants whom he attempted to bring “under the wings of the Shechinah.” But why would Yaakov’s departure be felt? At this time, he was a 63-year-old bachur, (25:27), who spent his days and nights totally immersed in the study of Torah. He had little, if any, contact with the townspeople around him. Who was aware of his presence when he was there that they would miss him after his departure?

The answer is that this is an illustration of the profound effect of a person who learns.

PUBLISHER’S MESSAGE

CELEBRATING FREEDOM

This week Jonathan Pollard went free.
After 35 years in captivity and parole, Jonathan Pollard was completely freed, the week of Parshas Vayeitzei. Despite the hardships, despite his unfair treatment, Jonathan remained steadfast in his beliefs all these years, determined in his hopes and aspirations. For three decades in prison, and then during parole, Jonathan portrayed remarkable dignity and commitment to Judaism.

For more than three decades, the government has been relentless in its persecution of Jonathan, and continued its prejudice in the severe restrictions it has placed on his release. In a sense, he remained a captive until these bonds were finally removed this week, and is now able to travel to his beloved Eretz Yisroel.

A number of individuals were committed to Jonathan, maybe none more than Rabbi Pesach Lerner whom the FJJ had the exclusive privilege of interviewing this week. He became like a brother to Jonathan, which becomes obvious in the fascinating interview. His selfless devotion to someone he had previously not known is a zchus that is immeasurable.

In expressing his determination to help Jonathan against insurmountable odds, Rabbi Lerner conveyed the following vort from the Lubliner Rav: Hashem told Avrohom to go outside and count the stars – “Usefor Hakochavim”. Most of us would not have attempted to count the countless stars, for it is virtually impossible. Avrohom however, attempted the impossible and began to count. Hashem told him “Koh Yiyeh Zarcha” – Your children will be the same. They will be able to do the impossible. Doing the impossible is in our genes.

We still have an opportunity to help. Mrs Pollard is suffering from a serious illness, one which may delay their travel to Israel. Each one of us can daven for her (Esther Yocheved bas Rayzl Bracha), and for her husband’s hatzlocha (Yonasson ben Malka), so that they can fulfil their dream of moving to Eretz Yisroel.

Jonathan had stated that he will not be free until he is able to be bentch gomel at the Kosel. May Hashem grant him and his devoted wife this dream, and may we be zechus to join him there with the coming of Moshiach speedily in our times.

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Netanyahu Talks With Pollard, Looks Forward To His Arrival In Israel

JNS

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu talked on the phone Tuesday with Jonathan Pollard, a former intelligence analyst who served three decades in prison for spying for and giving classified information to Israel, and who was freed last week from his parole conditions.

Netanyahu’s office released a video on its social-media channels of the prime minister talking to the 66-year-old, saying he looks forward to Pollard and his wife arriving in the Jewish state.

“We’re waiting for you. You should really feel at home,” the prime minister told Pollard. “You should now have a comfortable life where both of you can pursue your interests, and we can take care of Esther in the best medical treatment in the world.”

Esther Pollard, who also talked to Netanyahu during the Tuesday phone call, has been fighting an aggressive form of cancer.

Pollard has had a lifelong dream of living in Israel, where he holds citizenship. When he will move is unknown.

Last week, the U.S. Parole Commission declined to renew Pollard’s parole conditions and issued a certificate terminating parole and lifting all parole restrictions.

Pollard’s conditions under the Parole Commission, since being released in 2015, included remaining in New York City for at least five years unless granted permission to travel outside, having his computer use monitored by the U.S. government and wearing a wrist monitor.

Statement Of Attorneys For Jonathan J. Pollard

NEW YORK, NY (November 20, 2020) The U.S. Parole Commission has issued a certificate terminating parole and lifting all parole restrictions on our pro bono client Jonathan J. Pollard. Specifically, Mr. Pollard is no longer subject to a curfew, is no longer prohibited from working for a company that does not have U.S. government monitoring software on its computer systems, is no longer required to wear a wrist monitor that tracks his whereabouts, and is free to travel anywhere, including Israel, for temporary or permanent residence, as he wishes.

During the past five years, since his release on parole from federal prison, Mr. Pollard has been subject to these U.S. government restrictions. We are grateful and delighted that our client is finally free of any restrictions, and is now a free man in all respects. We look forward to seeing our client in Israel.

Mr. Pollard was released on parole November 21, 2015. He had been in prison since November 21, 1985, serving a sentence of life in prison for conspiring to deliver classified information to the State of Israel.

Over the past several months, we have communicated with the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Parole Commission, emphasizing that Mr. Pollard has had an exemplary record, both as a prisoner and as a parolee, and that there is every reason for confidence that he will be a model citizen after his parole restrictions are lifted.

Mr. Pollard has asked us to communicate the following on his behalf:

Mr. Pollard is happy to finally be able to assist his beloved wife Esther, who is fighting an aggressive form of cancer. Mr. Pollard would like people to know that it was his wife, more than anyone else, who kept him alive during all the years he was in prison.

Mr. Pollard is deeply grateful to his longstanding pro bono lawyers Eliot Lauer and Jacques Semmelman, and their law firm Curtis, Mallet-Prevost, Colt & Mosle LLP, who have stood by him for so many years, and whose perseverance, creativity, and forceful advocacy were instrumental in securing his release from prison on parole, and the lifting of the parole restrictions.

Mr. Pollard is also extremely thankful to Rabbi Pesach Lerner, who has worked tirelessly for many years on Mr. Pollard’s behalf, and to the generous contributors who have assisted financially during the past five years, as the U.S. government placed insurmountable impediments on Mr. Pollard’s ability to earn a living.

Mr. Pollard expresses appreciation and gratitude to Ambassador Ron Dermer, acting under the auspices of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, for their efforts on his behalf.

Mr. Pollard thanks Dov Friedberg for his long-standing support and friendship; Israeli attorneys Larry Dub and Nitsana Dirshman-Leitner for their devoted pro bono representation over many years; and Adi Ginsberg, Rabbi Asher Mivtzari, and all the volunteers under their direction for their unrelenting work in Israel on Mr. Pollard’s behalf.

Mr. Pollard expresses his deepest respect and heartfelt thanks to the late Chief Rabbi, His Honor Rav Mordechai Eliyahu zt”l, and to his entire family, as well as to his Chief of Staff Rav Chaim Suissa, for providing spiritual guidance and strength to Jonathan and Esther Pollard from the outset of the case, and whose friendship remains strong and vibrant.

Mr. Pollard is deeply grateful to so many others in the U.S., Israel, and around the world who have helped devotedly. They are too numerous to mention by name, but they include: Andrew Brooke, Goldi Steiner, Risha Balter and Nomi Winkler of Toronto; Bella Amiram and Naomi Knobel of Jerusalem; and in the U.S., the late Chaim Stern, attorneys Kenneth Lasson and Gary Apfel, and the late Judge George Leighton.

Finally, Mr. Pollard thanks all people of good will who have kept him in their prayers and hoped for this day.
A Song of Gratitude

JNS

It is said that King Hezekiah would have become the Messiah had he sung Shirah (Song of Thanks) after G-d miraculously delivered 185,000 Assyrian soldiers into his hands on one fateful night around 700 BCE. Unfortunately, he failed to do so. We cannot make the same mistake.

After the events of last week, it is again time to sing Shirah, and we should not miss the opportunity. For the very first time in American history a U.S. secretary of state visited areas of Israel that—until the Trump administration came along—were not fully recognized or even acknowledged as part of the land of Israel.

On Nov. 18 last year, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo took the unprecedented step of declaring that the cities and towns of Judea and Samaria are not “inconsistent with international law.”

Last week, he went further by visiting Judea and Samaria, illustrating that the settlements there not only are “not illegal,” but—without using the word—part of Israel’s “sovereign” territory.

It would be great, of course, if the Trump administration approved the extension of Israeli sovereignty once and for all over all of Judea and Samaria. Pompeo should be applauded not only for his visits to the City of David in Jerusalem, Psagot and the Golan Heights, but for his pronouncement that the United States would henceforth view the international BDS movement as anti-Semitic.

The second event that the Jewish people must sing the “Song of Thanks” for is the U.S. Justice Department’s decision to declare that Jonathan Pollard, after 30 years in prison and another five on restricted parole, was free to emigrate to Israel. The Justice Department declared, “This is in accordance with the statute, the commission has ordered that, as of today, his parole supervision is terminated and he is no longer subject to the conditions of parole.”

These are great accomplishments for the Jewish people. The Pompeo visit and the Pollard decision should give the younger generations a great deal of inspiration. So much more has to be accomplished. Besides extending Israeli sovereignty to all of Judea and Samaria, the Jewish people in America and in Israel have to be brought back to their roots, to the straight and narrow—to Torah Judaism.

This is not a fantasy. It can be done. Not many thought the State of Israel would be reestablished after 2,000 years, but sure enough it was. Hard work pays off. Keep the faith and sing Shirah.

Netanyahu Welcomes Lifting of Restrictions on Jonathan Pollard

JNS

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Saturday night welcomed the news that Jonathan Pollard, a former U.S. intelligence analyst who served three decades in prison for espionage on behalf of Israel, was no longer restricted by his parole, enabling him to immigrate to the Jewish state.

“For many years, [Netanyahu] has been committed to, and consistently worked towards, securing Pollard’s release,” the Prime Minister’s Office said in a statement.

Netanyahu thanked outgoing Israeli Ambassador to the United States Ron Dermer for “responsibly and sensitively leading the contacts” with the administration in Washington, according to the statement.

Netanyahu “hopes to see Jonathan Pollard in Israel soon, and together with all Israelis, extends his best wishes to him and his wife, Esther.”

Pollard’s lawyers, Eliot Lauer and Jacques Semmelman, announced last Friday that the U.S. Parole Commission had declined to renew their client’s parole conditions and issued a certificate terminating his parole.

These conditions, which were placed on Pollard since his release from prison in 2015, included remaining in New York City for at least five years, having his computer use monitored by the U.S. government and wearing a wrist monitor.

Pollard on Aliyah: ‘G-d Willing, Very Soon!’

JNS

Five years after his release on parole and two days after his travel restrictions ended, Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard released a statement on his next steps, tempering expectations of a rapid relocation to Israel.

“Thirty years ago, my beloved wife Esther found her way into USP Marion, the highest security prison in the United States, where I was languishing in a dungeon cell three stories underground behind 13 locks and keys. Esther reached out and cut the shackles off of my heart and restored my soul to life. That is when the fight for my freedom began in earnest,” he said in a statement through the Justice for Jonathan Pollard committee.

“Fast forward 35 years. Today, Esther, fearlessly cut the GPS device off of my wrist, restoring me to almost complete freedom (with full authorization from the parole office.) The final step to freedom that remains is our return home to the Land and the People we love. G-d willing, very soon!”

Pollard’s conviction of espionage for Israel some 35 years ago, while working as a naval intelligence officer, strained relations between Israel and the United States. His imprisonment led to a long campaign to have him released, including through repeated appeals for clemency by Israeli leaders to U.S. presidents. He was granted Israeli citizenship after his conviction.

In his statement on Sunday, Pollard said he and his wife were “overwhelmed with gratitude and we want to thank all of the wonderful people in Israel and in the U.S. from the bottom of our hearts who fought for us throughout all of the long years on the road to freedom.”

He said that due to his wife’s “dire medical situation” the couple would stay in the United States for a time, “calmly and quietly arranging our aliyah to Israel and assuring Esther’s on-going medical treatment.” Thus, he explained, the couple will keep “a very low profile so that I can focus on taking care of my beloved wife.”

He also released a picture showing him holding his tracking bracelet after Esther cut it off.
HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED?
I started working for the National Council of Young Israel in October 1991. I decided early on that if I'm going to represent all the Young Israel shuls across the country, I really need to go visit them. I need to visit shuls and people. How could I deal with them if I never met them? One night, I found out that there was going to be a program at the Young Israel of the Lower East Side, and that Jonathan Pollard was the topic of discussion. It was an evening dedicated to Jonathan Pollard. I thought, this would be a great time to go, because it wasn't Shabbos, I didn't need to leave my family, I could meet the president and learn about Jonathan Pollard.

I didn't know a lot about him, I was not active in the greater Jewish community when he was arrested. I went to the evening, I met the Rabbi and the balabatim, and I also heard a lot of information about this Jewish spy. I walked out with a lot of questions about what I heard. And I went back to my mentors at the National Council of Young Israel, and I called my mentors in Klal Yisroel, and asked them what I should do. They said if you have questions, and you think there's something to do, then follow your thoughts.

I began to research the case of Jonathan Pollard. And I realized that there was more to him then I thought. I started to speak up, but in order to speak up on his behalf, I felt it was imperative to speak out about such a situation, I felt it was imperative to go meet the man. So I arranged sometime in the early 1992 to go down to Raleigh-Durham, Butner North Carolina, and meet the man. And I met the man. We had a long conversation, and that's how I started to speak up on his behalf.

HOW OFTEN DID YOU VISIT POLLARD IN PRISON?
I assumed within the next 20+ years, between then and when he got out of prison, I must have visited the prison probably 100 times. In the early days, I perhaps was one of the few people speaking out on his behalf, asking questions, and visiting Washington.

The visit to the prison was firstly, coordinate that he should know that I was coming, to be sure that the day I’d be able to come that there were no other visitors, whatever the case may be. I would fly down to Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. I rented a car, and I drove a half hour to Butner. I was walking in as a member of the clergy, and as a clergy, I was able to visit him during normal visiting hours - which were often not very convenient. Sometimes I had to go the night before, sometimes had to stay over that night. In addition, any plane going in to Raleigh-Durham didn’t originate there. It was always a plane coming from somewhere else. If the weather was bad, I got stuck in Raleigh-Durham. Depending on when I went, I would often daven at the Shachris minyan of Chabad Raleigh-Durham.

WHICH GEDOLEI YISRAEL ENCOURAGED YOU?
During the course of my time, included was my Rebbe Rav Yaakov Weinberg zt”l, the Rosh Yeshiva of Baltimore, the Noviminsker Rebbe zt”l and Rav Shmuel Kamenetzky shlita. I had brachos from Rav Eliyashiv zt”l and Rav Aron Leib Shteinman zt”l, the Belze Rebbe shlita, and others.

When you walked into the prison, there was paperwork to fill out, you had to empty your pockets and go through a scanner, this is before 9/11. You had to take off your shoes and your belt, yarmulke, and they patted you down. You walked in to two sets of double steel doors, and you walked into the visiting area which was very structured; a lot of other inmates were there with their guests.

We sat there for 2 hours. I would always bring with me a bag full of quarters because there were a few vending machines in the visiting room, the inmates could not handle the money or touch the machines, and the first thing that I would do while I waited for Jonathan to come into the visiting room was to go to the vending machines and buy a few sodas for him. Potato chips, cookies, whatever I could find that was kosher because one can only imagine; the food in the prison has what to be desired. And if one is keeping kosher, what he can eat or not eat is even more limited. I wanted to make sure for the two hours that I was there, Jonathan would have more than enough nosh which for you and me may be nosh, but for an inmate can be lunch. We were there very often when in the middle of the visit, the alarm would ring, and it would be time for roll-call in the prison. And Jonathan would have to leave, go back into the compound and be present for roll-call, and then come back.

HOW DID YOU PLAN FOR THOSE VISITS?
The visit to the prison was firstly, coordinate that he should know that I was coming, to be sure that the day I’d be able to come that there were no other visitors, whatever the case may be. I would fly down to Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. I rented a car, and I drove a half hour to Butner. I was walking in as a member of the clergy, and as a clergy, I was able to visit him during normal visiting hours - which were often not very convenient. Sometimes I had to go the night before, sometimes had to stay over that night. In addition, any plane going in to Raleigh-Durham didn’t originate there. It was always a plane coming from somewhere else. If the weather was bad, I got stuck in Raleigh-Durham. Depending on when I went, I would often daven at the Shachris minyan of Chabad Raleigh-Durham.
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5. WHO WERE SOME OF THE PEOPLE YOU BROUGHT TO PRISON TO SEE POLLARD?

I accompanied every Israeli ambassador that went to see Jonathan Pollard. Danny Ayalon, Sallai Meridor, Michael Orihn, and the current ambassador Ron Dermer. Members of Knesset, various congressmen, numerous Rabbonim, and numerous other Roshei Yeshiva. The point being that in the early years of our relationship, Jonathan became very comfortable and trusting of me, and he wanted a third party to be present at all these meetings to be able to validate what was actually discussed at each meeting.

6. HOW WAS POLLARD ABLE TO BE A SHOMER SHABBOS JEW IN PRISON?

With great difficulty. Jonathan Pollard was not religious when he was imprisoned, he came to religion, frumkeit, and Torah values in prison – not religious when he was imprisoned, he came to religion, frumkeit, and Torah values in prison – not religious when he was imprisoned, he came to religion, frumkeit, and Torah values in prison – not religious when he was imprisoned, he came to religion, frumkeit, and Torah values in prison – not religious when he was imprisoned, he came to religion, frumkeit, and Torah values in prison. I once had the opportunity to take Rabbi Aryeh Zeiv Ginsburg of Cedarhurst to visit Jonathan. Rabbi Ginsburg was speaking at the upcoming Agudah Convention. I had asked Rabbi Ginsburg if he'd speak about Jonathan Pollard. He said he would – but he really would appreciate visiting Jonathan so he was able to speak about the person he actually met. (We went down, we met, and Rabbi Ginsburg spoke strongly about Jonathan at the Agudah Convention.)

Jonathan after he cut his wrist bracelet this week.

7. DID YOU EVER THINK HE WOULD BE FREE?

I always hoped and prayed he would be free, because the circumstances and story is so strange. Did I believe it deep down? I'd like to think that I did, and baruch Hashem I'm able to say now that he is free.

8. WHAT ARE HIS PLANS?

Jonathan has every intention to go to Eretz Yisroel as soon as he can, his wife is undergoing chemotherapy for cancer, and therefore they can't pick up immediately, and her doctors are now working on finding the right hospital and the right doctors to take over her treatment in Israel, there are other logistical issues that must be worked out, but we're hoping that within the next few weeks, Jonathan will be able to move to Eretz Yisroel, to Yerushalayim, where he wants to live the rest of his life with his wife Esther.

Speaking of his wife Esther, she was moseress nefesh to Jonathan all these years. The reason Jonathan was able to survive in the environment he was in was because of the chizuk and the love that Esther gave him. She is without question, the unsung hero in this story.

Once we're talking about unsung heroes in this story, another unsung hero of this story, within the context of being released from his parole restrictions, is the Israeli ambassador to the US, Ron Dermer, who has spent countless hours and countless meetings making sure that Jonathan was released from his restrictions.

9. WHAT MESSAGE WOULD YOU WANT TO GIVE OUR READERS?

HaKadosh Baruch Hu has given each of us endless kochos, and our responsibility is to use those kochos, those energies those abilities to the greater benefit of Klal Yisroel. Ours is never to question if we can be successful, ours is to do what we have to do, and leave the rest up to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Some of us, as the Hassidic saying goes, some of us can affect our family, some of us can affect our community and some of us can affect the greater klal.

All of us can have an affect and all of us have to do. That's the message I'd like to leave. If all of us would do what we can do in the context of our abilities, we can accomplish great things for Klal Yisroel. I'm appreciative to HaKadosh Baruch Hu that He gave me the zechus for many years to be involved in the mitzvah of pidyon shevuyim on behalf of Klal Yisroel.