

THE UNTOLD STORY

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Final Redemption: The Untold Story

Yaakov desired to reveal the End of Days - yet it was withheld from him. (Rashi)

"Yaakov called for his sons and said: 'Gather, and I will tell you what will occur in the End of Days. Gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Yaakov, and listen to Yisrael your father. (49:1-2)" The "End of Days," commentators say, refers to the Messianic era. Rashi comments that Yaakov wished to reveal to his children when Mashiach would come, presumably to comfort them and their descendants during their exile - yet the Divine Presence deserted him. He realized Hashem did not want the End of Days to be known; Mashiach was destined to remain a matter of faith, and not a matter of dates and deadlines.

Living as we do in an era of calendars, day-planners, and PDAs, the appeal of knowing an exact date and time is readily apparent. Not only would knowing the time of Mashiach allow us to ensure we have no conflicting simchos or tzedakah parties scheduled; it would also give us a sense of security and confidence, knowing that it is only a matter of time. As expressed by the prophet Chabakkuk (2:3), "For there is another revelation regarding the appointed time: It will speak of the End, and it will not deceive. Though it may tarry, await it, for it will surely come; it will not delay." Why, then, did Hashem insist that the End of Days remain a mystery?

There was a time, says the K'li Yakar, when the "End of Days" was a known entity. It was revealed to the Children of Israel that their sojourn in Egypt would come to an end after 210 years. Yet their time spent there was a spiritual disaster. Last week's parsha, Vayigash, concludes (47:27): Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; they acquired property there... One who boards the bus for a short ride often doesn't even bother to take a seat. But if you're taking the train and traversing the country, you might as well settle in for the ride.

Chazal, our Sages, say that the Jews in Egypt, over a relatively short time-span, descended into the very depths of impurity and decay. This, says the K'li Yakar, was triggered by their having known the length of their stay. "If there's nothing much I can do about it, and I'm here for the duration, I might as well make myself comfy..." Had they not known how long they'd be there; had they felt, perhaps, that they could have an effect on the outcome through their behaviour, then perhaps their stay in Egypt would not have had such tragic results.

This is why parshas Vayigash, which concludes with the Jews getting comfy-cosy in Mitzrayim, is immediately followed by parshas Vayechi, without the normal space between them, which, as Rashi points out, is an illusion to the concealment of the End of Days. It's as if to say to Yaakov, who desired to reveal the End: Been there, done that - it doesn't work.

An elderly Jew once suffered a severe blow to his health, which rendered him bed-ridden and to a large extent paralyzed. For many months, he lay in his hospital bed, in great pain, yet, as they say, holding on for dear life. He had great joy when people would come to visit, most of all members of his family. His face would radiate a special light; it was clear that these visits gave him the will to go on living despite his painful state.

One day, during one of his regular visits, his Rav noticed that his spirits seemed low. He was concerned; there was no joy - he seemed to have lost his will to live. Not long afterwards, he passed away. I can not forget how, at his funeral, the Rav poured out his wrath towards "the foolish and misguided doctor (his words were not so kind)," who, in the name of some pie-in-the-sky obsession with truth and realism, had insisted on telling him that there was no chance he would ever walk again. This, ultimately, was the blow that ended his life.

"Let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we shall die (Isaiah 22:13)." Where there is hope, there is light. Where there is no hope, darkness and depression reign. The K'li Yakar writes:

Great harm would result were the End of Days to be known. The generations preceding that time would forget Hashem. They would settle down in whatever land they found themselves, and completely ignore the ultimate redemption. It is for this reason that Hashem concealed the Final Redemption, in order that in every generation Jews would seek Hashem, and not seek to establish themselves comfortably in exile.

I believe there is a tremendous lesson here for parents and teachers (and anyone involved with motivating others): If you give a person hope, and the feeling that they can make a difference, they will respond with positive behaviour. But if you allow a person to feel that they are a failure, then hope is lost, and their behaviour will spiral downwards.

One of the three questions we will be asked when we are brought before the Heavenly Tribunal is: Did you await the Redemption (Shabbos 31a)? Our task is not to focus on dates and deadlines; it is to keep the flame of hope and belief burning.

Have a good Shabbos.

This week's publication was sponsored in loving memory of Yehudis bas Meir Lipa ob"m, who passed away on the tenth of Teves 5762, by her son David Betzalel Rowan. May her memory be a blessing.

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