

IN GOOD STANDING

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

This is one of those rare years that Nitzavim does not share a Shabbos with Parashas Vayailech. It is, therefore, the last parshah of the year, for as of this coming Monday night, Year 5762 from creation begins, may it be only a good year for us.

With the coming of 5762, G-d willing, the Sh'mittah year comes to an end, at least in terms of working the ground of Israel. That makes 5762 a "Motzei Sh'mittah Year" - the eighth year of the previous seven-year Sh'mittah cycle, and the first year of the next one.

In retrospect, 5761 was quite a year. Literally, a day before it began, the peace agreement still seemed somewhat credible. There were big glitches and snags yet to be overcome, but they were small compared to the new Intifadah waiting in the wings of history.

Even after the rock-throwing episode at the Kotel just before Rosh Hashanah 5761, and even after the vicious attack at Ramallah, it still seemed possible to deal with Arafat. And, it seemed unlikely that anyone would do it other than the then Prime Minister Ehud Barak and his partner, Shimon Peres, both of whom were willing to go to dangerous limits to appease Arafat.

Yet, the Israeli people turned their backs on Barak, thanks to Arafat and his colleagues. Everywhere Arafat should have supported Barak, he did not, and even stabbed him in the back when he needed his help the most. The dynamics of the Middle-East quickly changed, and with the election of Ariel Sharon, that changed seemed to speed up even more.

So much has happened so fast in one year that it seems as if it has occurred over two or three years. It is not just the Middle-East that has changed, but the WHOLE world. The administration of President Bill Clinton gave way to that of George Bush, and a whole new attitude towards politics and the Middle-East.

Other parts of the world have not only not supported Israel, but have even turned against Israel. Some small voices see what Arafat has been up to all along, and understand the Israeli plight and support her actions. However, masses of people, some of which include the ranks of leftist Israelis, can never find reason to fault Arafat and the Palestinian Authority, while at the same time, they have difficulty finding anything right in the Israeli response.

However, all of this is merely camouflage for the fact that Israel is at war, and has been now for just about one year. At the time, we did not know it, or even suspect it, but when the Palestinians sent rocks down from the Temple Mount on the Jewish worshippers below, it was never meant, it seems now, to have been an isolated event. In retrospect, it seems to have been the beginning of something much bigger, something whose end may be far in coming.

The year before that was 5760, or 2000 according to the Western World. There were great expectations that year. Year 2000 was the year of "Y2K," or the "Millennium Bug," which cost the world some \$64,000,000,000.00 (that's "billion") to fix and avoid. There were some minor problems along the way, but thank G-d, governments and businesses remained stable, and the end of history did not occur, at least not through a major world war and awesome destruction. The awesome destruction of that year came via Mother Nature.

However, according to the Talmud, that wasn't the year meant for such an event. It was a year meant for people to talk about such an event, to become focused on the potential arrival of Moshiach Ben Dovid:

The rabbis taught: The seven-year cycle during which Moshiach will come, in the first year, the verse, "I caused it to rain on one city, but on another city, I did not cause it to rain" (Amos 4:7). In the second year, slight famine (Rashi: a slight famine so that no place will be completely satisfied). In the third year, the famine will be great, and men, women, children, pious people, and men of good deeds will die; Torah will be forgotten by those who learned it. In the fourth year, some will be satiated while others will not, but in the fifth year there will be plenty and people will eat, drink, and be joyous, and Torah will return to those who learned it. In the sixth year, there will be voices . . . (Sanhedrin 97a)

As Rashi explains, the voices are either talk of the arrival of Moshiach, or the "voice" of the shofar announcing the same thing. What is unusual is that this should follow years of plenty. Normally, economic upswing results in a lack of Moshiach-consciousness, since Jews are busy regaining their financial equilibrium, and enjoying material success. It is usually hardship that "forces" many to think about salvation, and therefore, Moshiach's eventual arrival.

According to the Maharsha, Rashi's explanation creates a question, and that is, the Talmud will soon say that Moshiach's arrival is one of the three events that will occur during a "hesach hada'as" - while people aren't thinking about it (Sanhedrin 97a). He answers his own question by saying that, maybe the "voices" will not be those of man, but of Heaven, for during that year G-d will bring punishment to the Jewish people, as it says, "It will come from the G-d of Hosts with thunder and noise and a great voice." (Yeshayahu 29:6)

Shabbos Day:

In the seventh year, there will be war. (Sanhedrin 97a)

What we said previously was talking about the sixth year. What about the seventh year? The Talmud continues:

In the seventh year, there will be war. And there was, and still is. We're talking bombs, mortar shells, tanks and planes. The only question that most of us are probably asking at this point is where will it go from here? For the war to which the Talmud refers is that of the War of Gog and Magog, which according to one leading rabbi in Jerusalem, has already begun, for whether we want to admit it or not, world opinion is quite singular and quite "unfriendly" towards the Jewish people.

In the meantime, the so-called intellegensia of Israel is trying to re-write history, with the sole goal being the removal of the Jewish soul from Eretz Yisroel. The big argument is over what Theodore Herzl meant when he called his treatise, "Der Judenstaat," which up until now has been translated as "The Jewish State."

People with power to direct the educational curriculum for decades to come, are arguing that Herzl never meant to create a Jewish State. He meant "The State of The Jews," that is, a country whose majority would be of Jewish descent, and that's it. After that, it's replicate America, England, and Europe, and become as secular as you can along the way.

They fail to mention in their argument that Teddy was quite happy to build whatever he had in mind in Uganda, at the suggestion (read: insistence) of the British. Nor do they mention that his first "solution" to protect Jewish blood was to assimilate it or convert it to Christianity. Thus, though he may have been the founding father of the World Zionist Movement, but he certainly felt no historical or political connection to the Holy Land.

Yet, they hang their hats on him and his intentions as if he represented the entire United Nations and its mandate for the Jewish homeland. Forget it! He was unsure of what he was doing and what he could accomplish, feeling out himself, the Jews who would work with him, and the world within which he had to work.

The author of the article, Yoram Hazony of the Jerusalem Post (August 30, "Did Herzl want a 'Jewish' state?"), writes:

"It is this ideological revision that drives the insistence that Herzl never wanted such a state. For if Herzl, as the founder of the Zionist Organization, never intended to establish anything other than a 'state of the Jews,' then today's 'state of the Jews' partisans can portray themselves as advocates of the real Zionist tradition on which Israel's public life rests."

(See: <http://www.jpost.com/Editions/2001/08/26/Features/Features.33405.html> for the entire

article.)

All this proves is that we Jews can do what our enemies have done throughout history, and just as well: We can twist and re-write history to fit our mandate, as ridiculous and false it may seem to the onlooker. Ironically, their greatest advocates are sitting atop the Temple Mount, systematically destroying any Jewish connection to the holiest place in Jewish history. Ironically, the Arab World is nodding its head up and down, saying, "Right! There is nothing intrinsically Jewish about the land we call Palestine, so why don't you just leave before we make you go!"

Of course, they don't see any connection between what they say and do, and how the Arabs, measure-for-measure, mirror their every political move and throw it back in their faces. In the meantime, Iraq, reportedly, has infiltrated the West Bank as part of its grander mission to invade Israel and wipe out the Jews. Though Arafat (whose name in gematria equals 'satan') still doesn't speak outright about his intentions regarding the future of the Jewish people; Hussein and Iraq (many of whom hold is Gog) does, and he doesn't give a hoot about what the rest of the world thinks about him for doing so either.

Did we mention the downturn in the economy that has resulted in losses of jobs and reduced resources for charitable organizations, big time? And just at a time when the money was most necessary. For example, my wife runs an organization here in Israel that helps women suffering from depression after birth (www.nitza.org), the effects of which the world has become more aware in the media. Though the situation is only intensifying their already difficult mental and emotional states, there is less money available from donors to get them the help they really need.

Back to the War of Gog and Magog: The War of Gog and Magog is supposed to be THE final conflict that will lead to the Messianic Era, as the Talmud finishes: Motzei Sh'viis, Ben Dovid will come.

However, even the Talmud asks the obvious question:

Rav Yosef said, "Many Seven-Year Cycles have come, and still, he did not come."

However, the Talmud also provides the obvious answer:

Abaye answered, "Were there voices in the sixth year and war in the seventh? Furthermore, did they follow this order?"

So there you have it. Talk about Moshiach in the sixth, war in the seventh, Ben Dovid in the Eighth.

Advice to sell your property and make the move to Eretz Yisroel now while you can won't come from me, nor will I or can I tell you that this year will witness the redemption that we have longed for now over two thousand years. All you'll get from me is this d'var Torah, and a somewhat suspicious and lengthy "Hmmm."

The only advice I can give to you (if you're still reading my article) in this type of forum is, "Stay tuned." After the shock and surprise of 5761, who KNOWS what 5762 has in store, and at the rate

history is moving, we may find out faster than we care to know.

We'll address the Durban Conference in a separate article, G-d willing.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Not only with you do I make this covenant and this curse, but with those who do not stand here today before G-d, our G-d, as well as those here today. (Devarim 29:13-14)

HaRav Moshe Wolfson, shlita, the well-known Mashgiach of Yeshivah Torah v'Da'as of New York, recently addressed our community of Telzstone. Brilliantly deep as always, the rav pointed out along the way that Parashas Ki Savo, which always comes in advance of Rosh Hashanah and contains all those scary curses for disobedience, has 122 verses.

As it turns out, the three parshios that follow - Nitzavim, Vayailech, and HaAzinu - combined also contain 122 possukim. A coincidence? According to Rav Wolfson, not at all, but an allusion to the 122 days from the beginning of the month of Elul until the first day of Chanukah.

For, as we all know, teshuvah does not begin on the first day of Tishrei and Rosh Hashanah. It begins in earnest on the first day of Elul, so that by the time we get to Rosh Hashanah - The Day of Judgment - we have made all the necessary rectifications to be judged favorably right on Rosh Hashanah itself.

Evil people, of course, don't care and are judged immediately on Rosh Hashanah for bad. Righteous people, on the other hand, have paid their dues already and are judged favorably from the start. However, tradition teaches, there usually remains a large group which belongs to neither camp - the 'Benonim' - which requires the last nine days of the Aseres Yemai Teshuvah to convince Heaven of their worthiness.

The total so far stands at forty days for doing teshuvah.

Alas, we are not like earlier generations. In olden days, all one had to do was hear the town crier call out "Elul!" before sunrise, and Jews came running from all directions to the synagogue to repent and cry and beg for their very lives. Today, for many, the word "Elul" evokes a different kind of response, such as, "Rosh Hashanah so soon, again? Didn't I just pray on Rosh Hashanah last year?"

So, G-d in His infinite mercy told us, "Okay, you can have until Shemini Atzeres to make good. I'll keep the judgment open until then!"

Well, that makes fifty-two days of teshuvah now.

Then came the Arizal who told us that really, nowadays, the judgment continues until the last day of Chanukah. Not that a person should count on that and hold off until then to make the appropriate

changes; he may never make it to then. Rather, if Heaven sees a person struggling to do teshuvah but he is moving slower than the calendar, then they say, "Oh, okay. Give him until the last day of Chanukah, and THAT'S IT!"

Rav Wolfson said that the point was this. The 122 verses of the three parshios, which represent Moshe Rabbeinu's parting words and final criticism of the Jewish people, are to inspire us to do serious teshuvah and make amends with Heaven over the 122 days from Rosh Chodesh Elul to Chanukah. If we do, then we end up at 'Zos HaBrochah,' the final parshah of the entire Torah filled with blessing.

However, if we don't do the necessary teshuvah during the allotted time, then we are stuck with the curses found within the 122 verses of Ki Savo. And, judging by how history turned a sharp corner last Rosh Hashanah, the rav said, "we didn't do sufficient teshuvah in the previous year." Therefore, Rav Wolfson entreated us, we must correct this in the upcoming year, so that any upcoming potential curses can be turned into blessings instead. Amen.

MELAVE MALKAH: History & Beyond

This will be, G-d willing, the second last installment of this series of classes, "History & Beyond," and the most abstract of all. As I mentioned before, there is nothing simple about the World-to-Come; it is straight Kabbalah. However, in reality, Sod is the simplest and most sublime version of reality, for it is G-d's version of reality. It is man, immersed in the externalities of everyday life that cloak the Presence of G-d who has difficulty relating to this high level of Truth.

If one thinks about it, this is really the reason why so much happens in life that does not make sense to us, especially when good people suffer and evil people seem to prosper. Mistakenly, people take this to be a sign that life is random and that G-d, if He even exists, doesn't get involved in the affairs of man.

The real truth is that the anomalies of history are the result of a deeper undercurrent of history, a far more sublime purpose for creation than most people perceive. Simply put, people who learn Sod, the RIGHT WAY - with proper grounding in traditional Torah texts, with command of the original Kabbalistic vocabulary, and ABOVE ALL, with tremendous fear of G-d and reverence for what they are learning - have few questions about the way G-d runs His world.

However, this will change dramatically after Moshiach's arrival, as more people become privy to this holy information, and increase their depth of vision of G-d's purpose for creation. It will continue to change as history moves forward and upward:

"... Their ascension towards Him in the same manner that they were revealed in the beginning for the

sake of existence." However, in the beginning all of His revelations were for the sake of descending, which meant that higher levels had to be hidden from lower levels. However, at the end when creation reaches its purpose, they will ascend level by level and all lower levels will become part of the higher levels that will illuminate them and become revealed to them, until the lowest level reaches the upper most level possible through inclusion in it. It will happen according to the same order that they first became revealed.

The order of His revelation was the first emanation of the light of Ain Sof, which at first was everywhere equally. After that, there was the 'Kav' (the thin light that came back into the Hollow about which we spoke in earlier weeks), then 'Tzimtzum' (Constriction), then 'Adam Kadmon' (literally, 'First Man,' but it refers to the level of spiritual existence between Ain Sof and Atzilus, corresponding to Keser in the Sefiros), then the first three 'heads' of Arich Anpin, then to 'Abba' (Chochmah) and 'Imma' (Binah), from there to 'Zehr Anpin' (Chesed through Yesod). From there it went to the 'worlds of separation.'

In the same way the light will ascend, from level to level. At the end of Yemos HaMoshiach, they will ascend to Zehr Anpin, and this is what the Talmud says:

In the future, tzaddikim will be called by the Name of The Holy One, Blessed is He . . . (Bava Basra 75b)

This will be as a result of the ascension to the level of Zehr Anpin, which will occur at the end of the Sixth Millennium, when the Chesed becomes revealed through the "mouth" of the Yesod, which is the Ateres HaYesod, which is the rectification of Zehr Anpin and Nukveh (Chesed through the Malchus) that occurs at the end of the Sixth Millennium (incidentally, as the Leshem explains explicitly in another work, this point in time is precisely the last moment that Moshiach can come and will come, and the Gra said the same thing).

After Yemos HaMoshiach and in the World-to-Come, existence will again ascend to the 'First Three,' level after level. In the Seventh Millennium (6000-7000), to the level of Binah; in the Eighth Millennium (7000-8000), to the level of Chochmah; in the Ninth Millennium (8000-9000), to the level of the Upper Da'as, and in the Ten Millennium (9000-10,000), to the Keser itself, which is the level of Arich Anpin ... After all that, existence ascends even further to and the four worlds of Atzilus, Beriyah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah become included in the world of Ain Sof ..." (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 519)

To be continued. As you wonder what all of this means and if I ever intend to explain it, and if not, then why did I bother to mention it all, I offer you the following explanation.

As history winds down, whether this year or in years to come, we are already entering a period of time that works hard to take away our loftiness and drown us in immediate and temporal - real, but temporal - concerns. Whether we can understand it, or whether we can relate to the ideas or find them quite foreign, we must know they exist.

Not only must we know they exist, but we must know that they supercede any reality of which we may presently be a part, good or bad, and that they represent the ultimate destination of mankind. It is these ideas that represent the stars for which man must reach, without which he may never leave the mud.

Have a great Shabbos,

L'Shannah tova tichasayvu v'tichasaymu l'alter u'l'chaim tovim v'shalom.

Pinchas Winston
