WHEN IT MEASURES UP

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

You shall not have in your house a measure and a measure - a large one and a small one. (Devarim 25:14)

As the Talmud points out, G-d punishes measure-for-measure (Sanhedrin 90a). For those of us who were devastated by disengagement, it seemed like Divine retribution. There was serious flooding in several parts of the world right after the removal of the settlers from Gush Katif, and raging fires in others. There is, without question, amazing parallels between the stories of heartbreak and destruction in Azza, and that of the southern states that were pummeled by Hurricane Katrina, except that they seem greatly magnified in the case of the latter.

It is not a question of being vindictive or gloating over the suffering of others, G-d forbid. America has been a good friend for many years, and does much chesed the world over, including playing host to millions of Jews who are free to pursue their religion in peace and even affluence. Nevertheless, from a Torah perspective, in spite of all of her good, she has made some drastic mistakes regarding the handling of Eretz Yisroel and the people who live there. However, at the end of the day, it may not be about America, but about the Jews so firmly planted in her soil.

It is reminiscent that right on the heels of the suicide bombing in the center of Jerusalem at the Sbarro restaurant (August 9, 2001), George Bush insisted that the Road Map be implemented in spite of the tragedy that claimed 15 lives, just to spite the terrorists who were trying to derail it. The attack on the World Trade Center occurred only one month later. Overnight, the Americans were made to feel first hand what the Israeli people lived with daily, on a larger scale.

Indeed, after almost every suicide-bomber terrorist attack in Eretz Yisroel, a calamity occurred somewhere else in the world, and always on a much larger scale. It is as if G-d is saying to the Jews of Israel: It could have been far worst than it was.

It is hard to see the mercy of Divine judgment at such times, except when something worst happens elsewhere. Then, all of a sudden you realize that even though it seemed as if G-d had abandoned us during our time of need, the truth is that He was there all along limiting the damage that seemingly had to occur.

The bottom line is, in spite of the "coincidences" that connect Katrina to Katif, something terrible has

happened to a lot of people, and the effects will be very long term and have the potential to trigger other larger catastrophes as well that will touch the entire world. G-d is not into the wholesale slaughter of people, and certainly not without reason. And, for whatever reason Divine Providence decided to allow so much destruction to occur, it is too large and sublime to simply assume that G-d is getting back at the American people for their handling of Jewish land.

I have to admit that I, like many others, have been doing exactly that. However, after watching the devastation occur while in Toronto, and after hearing updated reports about the effects of Hurricane Katrina, you have to wonder about those deeper reasons. Like in the case of so much Hashgochah Pratis throughout history, things are not necessarily what they seem to be at first. The immediate effects on an event are not always the underlying reason for the event itself, and sometimes the basis for a crisis can be just the opposite of what it first seemed to be.

For example, as I mention in Parashas Re'eh, there was a very positive side to hitnatkut. Not that the government planned for this effect, but it was intended by G-d. As part of the small picture, abandoning Gush Katif was an illogical act that probably has more to do with American survival and Arab oil, not to mention the political and legal survival of Sharon, than it does with appeasing Arabs who are not interested in appeasement. They're the only ones being honest about the situation.

As part of the larger picture, for all we know, hitnatkut may have been part of the transition from a heart of stone to one of flesh, a necessary prerequisite, the prophet has told us, for Yemos HaMoshiach to take place. It was a heart-breaking situation, and perhaps, a heart-revealing one, part of the final preparation for the late, great period of Yemos HaMoshiach.

What might the Big Picture say about the events of today?

SHABBOS DAY:

G-d, your G-d will then end your captivity and have compassion upon you, and will return and gather you from all the nations to which G-d sent and scattered you. Even those at the far corners of the earth G-d, your G- d, will gather and take you. G-d will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you will possess it. He will do good for you, and multiply you beyond previous generations. (Devarim 30:3-5)

America has to go. Or better yet, the Jews of America have to go, at some point in time. Anyone who believes in Torah cannot disagree with this, for belief in the Final Redemption is one of the Thirteen Principles of Faith, and it includes complete Kibbutz Golios. However, as to when they have to go is up for grabs, with the Jews of Eretz Yisroel saying the time has come, and many of the Jews of America saying, "NO WAY!"

This is not a popular discussion with American Jewry, to say the least. Let's face it: if making aliyah in the near future is not threatening, then talking about aliyah now is no problem. However, if the idea of making aliyah interferes with one's peace of mind, then such a discussion is, at the very least,

annoying, and at the worst, heretical and necessary, nonetheless.

Whatever it is that keeps Jews glued to American soil has to be removed. A situation has to develop that eliminates the reasons that make Jews feel more Jewish in America than in Eretz Yisroel. People seem to expect Moshiach to show up all of a sudden one day and say, "Okay guys, time to come home," and lo and behold, they will all come in joy immediately. "If so, then why get upset about the issue before that time?" people ask.

It would be nice if that were so, but it is also unlikely. Rather, part of G-d's mercy includes a transition from exile to redemption; it is not meant to be an overnight thing. The Final Redemption is not a matter of simply picking up a paycheck and going out for supper, necessitating only a change of clothing. Quite the contrary! Our very essence will change, and that cannot simply happen at the winking of an eye.

Until Katrina came along, the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 was the last major disaster to affect the United States in a big way. It shut the country down for four straight days, and resulted in the deaths of just under 3,000 people. Recovery was slow in coming, but for the most part, it came, albeit with a war against terrorism as well. That was America's response to an "Act of G-d," to shoot the messengers, and to avoid the soul-searching that Nineveh once did to avert national disaster.

Who will America go to war against this time for this "Act of G-d," which is clearly far larger in scale than the destruction of the Twin Towers, especially if George Bush and Condoleezza Rice cannot see any Divine mussar in what has just happened?

In other words, the two events, the Twin Towers attack and Hurricane Katrina, are not isolated and disconnected from one another, but the second is in addition to the first, and an upping of the ante if you will. More importantly, they are both part of a process whose end goal may be the fall of the American Empire. Something that has to happen to make Kibbutz Golios possible.

In other words, though Hurricane Katrina only became part of our consciousness when it was first spotted forming out over the Atlantic Ocean just days before it attacked the southern coast of the United States, in reality it had probably been coming for years, if not longer. It simply wasn't just a new response to a new crisis to do with Eretz Yisroel, but an event that had been coming for some time, even before Ariel Sharon agreed to unilaterally abandon Azza.

If so, then what is its connection to hitnatkut? Why did this world disaster come so close on the heels of the expulsion of the settlers from that part of Eretz Yisroel, and why are there so many ironic similarities between the two events?

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

So said the L-rd G-d: "Because Edom acted in wreaking vengeance against the house of Yehudah, and has incurred guilt by taking vengeance on them, therefore," so said the L-rd G-d, "I shall stretch forth My

hand upon Edom, and I shall cut off from her both man and beast, and I shall make it desolate from the south, and Dedan will fall by the sword. And I shall lay My revenge upon Edom by the hand of My people Israel, and they will do to Edom according to My wrath and according to My fury, and they will know My vengeance," says the L-rd G-d. (Yechezkel 25:12-14)

The following discussion is part of the answer we seek:

Whether we are talking about the redemption of the Jews or the plagues against the Egyptians, it was supernatural. For, it is known that the Jewish people were not fitting for redemption, and likewise with regard to the plagues in Egypt, it says in the Holy Zohar (Noach 61b; Chaye Sarah 121b), that they had not yet filled their measure. There they answer the question in the Talmud (Megillah 10b; Sanhedrin 39b): Does The Holy One, Blessed is He, take pleasure in the fall of the evil? The Holy Zohar answers the question by saying that there is a difference: regarding those who have filled their measure there is joy . . . (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 402)

What does this mean? It means that even if G-d wants to punish a nation, He won't do so until that people truly deserves it. G-d created every nation, and He knows the nature of each, what it is capable of doing for good or for bad. He knows what to expect from each individual nation, rewarding each for the good it has done and punishing each for the evil it should have avoided, based upon its individual strengths and weaknesses.

What if Hurricane Katrina was meant to come for some time now, to satisfy some ultimate historical goal? Say it was pushed it off with the good America performed, like coming to the rescue of the tsunami survivors, or through the money it has supplied Israel over the decades. What if America was being saved from further disaster in the merit of the Jews she hosts and makes comfortable?

And, what if America's overt involvement in hitnatkut was the threshold she crossed over to override all those merits? What if America's pushing of the Israeli government was the measure necessary to bring the fall of America, Part 2? It would certainly explain why, in spite of all the efforts of so many, and the tefillos of so many more to stop the process of disengagement, it went ahead anyhow. There is something greater at stake here than the abandonment of one area of Eretz Yisroel for the time being.

If so, then it doesn't make a difference if the U.S. government sees the connection between what they were a part of and what happened to them in response. The connections are for us, for us to see the hand of G-d in it to know that, though it seemed as if G-d had abandoned us in Gush Katif, the real truth is that He was there with us, crying on the shoulders of both soldiers and settlers alike. However, unlike man, G-d sees only the Big Picture, and that included events still yet to come, but events that were still invisible to us.

And, if so, then hitnatkut and Hurricane Katrina portray a different message to a different crowd. There is no question that the fall of Gush Katif must send us soul-searching here in Eretz Yisroel, and it probably represents one of the final acts of secular Zionism. But, on a grander scale, it probably

represented the filling of America's measure that allowed Katrina to do her thing.

The question is, what's next? Many of us over here in Eretz Yisroel know that the hitnatkut of Gush Katif, which is now history, was only the beginning of a process that might end up causing the loss of control over this country for about nine months. And, let's face it, since America is now in a survival mode heavily dependent on Arab oil, making Israeli democracy an issue of the past, one does not have to be a rocket scientist to predict the extent of American pressure in the future to surrender more land to the Arabs.

And, should those forces succeed in doing so, causing holy Jewish soil to fall into the hands of thieves and murderers, then without a doubt, the rooster will come home to roost. And, just as Hurricane Katrina out did the attack on the World Trade Center, the next disaster, whatever it will be and from wherever it will come, will be even worst, until living as a Jew in America will no longer be a viable option.

It is not something we pray for, or unlike the Arabs, celebrate when it happens. However, it is something that we acknowledge is in the cards if the process to bring it about is not aborted.

MELAVE MALKAH:

You shall not have in your house a measure and a measure - a large one and a small one. (Devarim 25:14)

At the end of this week's parshah there is a discussion about keeping accurate weights and measures, so that no one is cheated through a transaction. Following this is Parashas Zachor, the recounting of the attack by Amalek, which we read as the Maftir the week before Purim.

These pesukim are the famous source of the Vilna Gaon, who found a hint to his name in the posuk about complete weights, that he could have led the Jewish people in their final battle against Amalek. However, the Midrash simply sees the juxtaposition of the two parshios as mussar about the spiritual and eventual physical effects of cheating in the market place.

However, perhaps there is a third explanation. Perhaps the Torah is informing us what it will take to overcome Amalek at the End-of-Days, if the Jewish people do not hasten the redemption: the measure of Amalek to be completed through his attacks against the Jewish people and on Eretz Yisroel, after which, as the GR"A and the Torah points out (Ki Savo follows the account of Amalek), we WILL come to the land.

If so, then this also sheds a new light on the following Talmudic passage:

Rav said, "All the dates of redemption have already passed, and now it depends upon repentance and good deeds." Shmuel said, "It is enough that the mourner remains in mourning!" This is like an earlier disagreement: Rebi Eliezer said, "If Israel will repent then they will be redeemed, and if they will not, then they will not." Rebi Yehoshua said to him, "If they do not repent they will not be

redeemed?! Rather, The Holy One, Blessed is He, will cause to rise a king who will make decrees as difficult as those of Haman and Israel will repent and return to the right path." (Sanhedrin 97b)

This will not only bring about national teshuvah of the Jewish people, but will also give Amalek a chance to complete his fill of evil against the Jewish people, so G-d can finally take His revenge against the enemies of the Jewish people. Indeed, it says:

After Moshiach comes, a major war will be instigated against Israel, as mentioned in the Holy Zohar (Shemos 7b); see this at length until page 10. It is also in Parashas Vayaira (119a) and Parashas Toldos (139). This is the "War of Gog and Magog" spoken about in Yechezkel (38, 39), and Zechariah (14), as well as in Midrash Tehillim (Mizmor 118:9): Three times in the future, Gog and Magog will war with Israel and go up against Jerusalem; they will assemble and anger the nations to go up to Jerusalem with him, as it explains there. Also see Vayikra Rabbah (27:11), and many other places. After, The Holy One, Blessed is He, will take His revenge against them, as spoken about in Yechezkel, and the Jewish people will dwell in their land in security and with much good . . . (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 491)

Not showing enough sympathy over the Sbarro attack and pushing the Road Map in spite of logic to the opposite, perhaps resulted in the attack on the World Trade Center. Actually forcing the evacuation of Jews from Jewish land for the sake of extremely unreliable partners in the peace process has resulted, perhaps, in Hurricane Katrina. The Midrash is predicting that the attempt to wrestle Jerusalem away from the Jewish people will result in nothing less than the complete annihilation of Gog and Magog, and the final stage of transition to Yemos HaMoshiach.

Uncannily, the final death throes of the nations that are fermenting into the reality of Gog and Magog is dictated by those very nations themselves. It will NOT be an easy road for us Jews along the way, but we will survive. They, on the other hand, will not.

As 5766 rolls in with less than two-and-a-half weeks until Rosh Hashanah, the stage for the final act of history is set far more than people care to believe.

Good Shabbos,
PW

Text

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