

# THE PERFECT STORM

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

## FRIDAY NIGHT:

*G-d said to Noach, "The end of all flesh has come before Me, for the earth is filled with robbery through them; and behold, I am about to destroy them from the earth." (Bereishis 6:13)*

Well, it's the rainy season here in Eretz Yisroel, or at least it is supposed to be. Amazingly, once again dark clouds formed at the end of Succos, just in advance of the change from the blessing for dew to that of rain in the Shemoneh Esrai. It was as if they were heralding the change of season, which has come around all too fast.

However, this year they may also have been a warning about other changes. While many of us were celebrating Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah, hundreds of fellow Jews were clamoring to escape Egypt after a deadly terrorist attack. And this news came on the heels of other reports about other deadly attacks against the Americans in Iraq, and all kinds of essays that have been circulating about the impending oil crisis - the final one.

But for most of us, life goes on, as it should. As long as one's family is not too directly affected by any number of the negative events occurring in the world, it is hard to feel the impact of what is going on around the world, or even in one's own backyard. As long as the storm clouds only show up on the weather screen, it is safe to assume, we like to believe, that they will not rain on our party. And that is exactly the way it was in Noach's time as well.

Once, while flying to the States, I saw a movie called, "The Perfect Storm." I am one of those people who have difficulty sleeping on airplanes, and after a while, I find it difficult to learn or read as well. Once I took a pill to help me sleep, but it kicked in hours later, and I struggled with its effects for hours to come. You never saw such jet lag. No more pills for me.

I often wonder if the person choosing the movies for in-flight entertainment has a wry sense of humor, given some of the things they show on planes. I couldn't understand why they were showing a film about a hurricane to an audience thousands of miles up in the air, being bounced around by turbulence.

For those who did not see the movie, it was about Hurricane Grace, a massive and highly destructive storm that did a lot of damage in 1991, including the sinking of a fishing boat, the basis of the story of the film. I do not know how much of the movie is fact or fiction, but I learned some important lessons

from it nevertheless.

One part in the movie had particular meaning for me. It was the scene during which the meteorologist grasped the potential meaning of the big picture forming before him on his weather computer. Looking intently, he noticed how three weather fronts were converging from totally different directions, and though at the time they were quite distant from each other, that they were on a deadly collision path.

Speaking out loud to a seemingly uninterested co-worker, and with a sense of awe, he described what he called the perfect storm: if the three weather fronts collided, a so-called freak of nature, the result would be a storm of unbelievable proportions, the likes of which are hardly ever scene in the course of a single century.

"You could be a meteorologist all of your life, and never see something like this," he says somewhat excitedly at the prospect of what he was watching form before his very eyes.

And what were the chances of the Titanic hitting an iceberg and sinking, or of 19 terrorists crashing two jetliners into the World Trade Center on America soil and bringing them both down, or of four hurricanes hitting the coast of Florida within six weeks?

### **SHABBOS DAY:**

*"I, Myself am bringing a flood of water upon the earth to destroy all living flesh which is under the heavens; all that is on the earth will die." (Bereishis 6:17)*

At some point in the movie, back in the weather room, the same meteorologist utters the fateful words, "Oh my God, it's happening." The rest of the movie is about how the hapless fisherman, who according to the story were out there in the first place to prove a point, valiantly fought against it, only to lose the battle.

There are some nice scenes. Crisis turns enemies into friends, and everyone into heroes, all of which only serves to emphasize the tragedy of the entire story. One truly senses the futility of the entire episode when after finally finding the fish they had sought after, the ice maker necessary to keep the fish fresh until they can return and bring it to market breaks down, and then later, to save their lives, they have to dump their catch anyhow.

And then comes the terrible moment of realization when they know they will not escape the clutches of the terrible winds of Hurricane Grace, after experiencing a little sunlight and hope while passing through her eye. From that moment onward, it no longer is a question of if, but when, and you can't help but feel their sense of despair.

But let's not forget the point of the movie, best expressed by the meteorologist back in the weather room. The movie's title sums up more than a freak storm in the course of thousands of years of history; it sums up thousands of years of history. It sums up how many small events, each one not

that dangerous on its own, can occur simultaneously and create deadly and often tragic results. It sums up how easily people can fall for the illusions of everyday life, and be caught totally by surprise in the middle of deadly storms they can't escape.

I mean, when was the last time any straw broke a camel's back? When many other straws preceded it, and created a load that made the back of the camel vulnerable to breakage. Everything in life comes down to moments and turning points and points of no-return. The trick in life is in recognizing them before they occur, in order to reverse the dangerous trend before it is too late. The trick is to become a spiritual meteorologist and see how the existing smaller events can potentially come together and create a catastrophic larger event.

Most people think that the reason why Man was exiled from the Garden of Eden was because he ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, after G-d had told him not to. The truth is, according to Sod, that is not the case. In truth, had that been Adam's only sin, then he would have been permitted to remain in the Garden, since G-d Himself had already begun work on the repair to Creation that had resulted.

In other words, the evil that Adam had brought into reality by disobeying G-d had still lacked any concrete embodiment, and as such, it could be destroyed relatively simply, without the need for mortality, and therefore, expulsion from the Garden. If so, then what forced the issue had caused them to expelled into the bitter and harsh reality of the world beyond Paradise?

The birth of Kayin. As the Leshem explains, once Adam and Chava procreated prior to Shabbos and while they remained in a state of spiritual impurity from the Snake, they provided physical clothing for the spiritual impurity of the Snake and hence, Kayin was the first person to be born with an internal yetzer hara. It was THAT reality that made necessary death and therefore, expulsion from the Garden.

They say that in the 1920s the Chofetz Chaim used to bang his table during Seudos Shlishis and call out, "Millions are going to die, and they are doing nothing about it!" At the time, people who heard the Chofetz Chaim probably had no idea what the great tzaddik was talking about. Millions are going to die, G-d forbid? Which millions? And who are the "they" who should be doing something to prevent the deaths, and what should they be doing?

After the Holocaust, it became clear who the millions were, and there have been countless arguments about what should have been done to prevent the death of 6,000,000 Jews, if anything could have been done. But, the bigger question might be, how did the Chofetz Chaim know this information before Hitler, y"s, ever rose to power to carry out his "Final Solution"?

### **SEUDOS SHLISHIS:**

*After seven days, the waters of the Flood came upon the earth. In the 600th year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, all the fountains of the depths burst open; the*

*windows of the skies opened up. It rained on the land for 40 days and 40 nights. (Bereishis 7:10-12)*

Long before G-d carries out His plan, for good or for destruction, He lets us in on His plans. Somehow, somehow, He allows us to be conscious, to sense what He is up to, in order to spare us from destruction or to allow us to participate in that which He plans to build (such a teshuvah movement).

In each case, it is a spirit, that is, a spiritual reality only. There are hints to it, in some form or another, and those who are spiritually astute - that is, those who know the Torah deeply and how G-d runs His world and our history - can sense it and feels it potential to become reality though it has yet to in any concrete form. And, because it has yet to become concretized, it takes less of a miracle to adjust it.

Long before Hitler, y"s, was born, history had already turned many dangerous corners that was creating the potential for another world war, and a Holocaust. Even after Hitler was born (I believe he almost died at birth), he had yet to go through the experiences that would mold him into the Jew hater he later became, and capable of exterminating 6,000,000 Jews.

Great people like the Chofetz Chaim, either on their own or as a gift from G-d, can sense the spiritual winds of change. What the tzaddik was probably warning about was the negative spiritual energy during his time that was seeking a physical embodiment, something he tried desperately to thwart, but apparently to no avail. He died in 1933, just as Hitler, y"s, was rising to power and the position to concentrate the Jews of Europe in death camps.

Perhaps his death was that moment in time, that point of no-return, when the spirit of evil located its vehicle, forcing history to follow a path and play itself out. Like the moment that Noach was told to board the Ark and prepare for the Flood. Too many straws had been loaded on the camel's back; no more warnings remained to be given, and history was on a fast track to global destruction.

I just happened to see the Jerusalem Post's coverage of the aftermath of Hurricane Jeanne, after her rampage through parts of Florida this last Yom Kippur. I felt bad for the people who suffered, and some of the despair they must have had having to clean up again after the fourth hurricane in six weeks.

However, like all such disasters, there was irony in this one. In the words of one congregant of the shul that suffered through the storm, he said, "I will never for this Yom Kippur."

True, hurricanes like all crises can make the life-and-death tone of Yom Kippur more real. In fact, I can still remember being in shul on Yom Kippur when the rabbi relayed information about the '73 war in Eretz Yisroel, and the dire situation. I had been 14 at the time, and I certainly felt the potential loss of our Jewish homeland.

Ironically, the other Yom Kippur the Florida congregant said he would never forget was the same one: he had been in Israel in 1973 during the war. He had since left Eretz Yisroel, only to meet up with

potential doom once again and many years later, this time on the coast of a . . . Florida, of all places!

But, what really got to me was the rabbi's message: "We are trying not to take this too personally."

Read: as a message from God. But what if it WAS a personal message from G-d? I don't mean to the rabbi and his congregants specifically (although by the laws of Hashgochah Pratis it has to be that too, but that is between them and G-d)? What if, like the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York, Heaven is telling us that we are too comfortable and attached to our lives in the Diaspora?

What if we're not talking only about hurricanes, but about another event in a series of events occurring around the world that in and of themselves they seem unimportant from a historical point of view, but taken together mean something VERY significant from a big picture point of view? What if it was another straw on the back of Jewish history, and we're reaching the breaking point?

What if?

### **MELAVE MALKAH:**

*The Flood was upon the land for 40 days; the waters increased until they raised and carried the ark above the earth. (Bereishis 7:17)*

I remember as a boy playing baseball. Oh, that helpless feeling of hitting a baseball a little too far and watching it sail towards a house, right for a big, expensive picture window in a neighbor's house. Standing there watching that ball sail, pride quickly turns to fear and regret as your brain keeps making the calculation over and over again, working out the trajectory of the ball while a little voice inside your head keeps whispering over and over again, "It's going right for the window."

And lo and behold, there is the owner of the house, out in his backyard gardening away and oblivious to the projectile heading his way at glass-breaking speed. In fact, even the co-players don't see where it is heading. And, for a few precious moments time seems to stand still, but not the emotions which await with trepidation an explosion of glass, and the various other consequences that will follow in its wake .

It's so deceptive. The sun is still shining and the air is so fresh. It is a beautiful day while the ball remains airborne and the picture window remains whole. The boys are having fun, and the gardener is still happily involved in his work . . . as that nasty little ball just follows the laws of nature, or more accurately Divine Providence.

And then it finally happens: SMASH!!!!!!

And, then like a hurricane, everything suddenly changes. The game ends, the batter halts in his tracks, and the gardener jumps in shock, quickly observes the shattering of his peace, and then turns to see the cause of it. And all of a sudden, it is a different world, and an unpleasant one at that.

But that is only a baseball and a large piece of glass. What about an entire world?

Some say that nothing is really different today. They say that the world is just as calamitous as it has always been. All that has changed, they claim, is our ability to cover historical events in the news and to bring them to hundreds of millions of people quicker.

Right.

And in Noach's time? What can you say about a crazy man who builds a large water-tight vessel up in the mountains, or about a rabbi who rants about the death of millions when the world is building towards international peace? Probably not the same thing you would say to that man when the rains actually show up on time, and the door of the Ark closes.

The only thing that stands between a regular storm and a perfect one, in G-d's world, is His will, and knowing this is the fundamental difference between reading about perfect storms, and being caught up in them.

Have a good Shabbos,  
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