

DA'AS IN THE WIND

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

However, if you will not listen to Me, and do all of these commandments; if you will deride My laws, and detest My judgments and not do all My command-ments, but void My covenant, then . . . I will disperse you among the na-tions, and will draw out the sword after you. Your land will lie desolate, and your cities will be completely destroyed. (Vayikra 26:14-15, 16)

In general, I try not to speak negatively about a particular person in my parshah sheet (even if there is a mitzvah to do so, or it is at least halachically permissible), for the simple reason that amidst the thousands of people who read PERCEPTIONS each week, there is bound to be someone who will be offended by my comment. This usually results in an angry e-mail that forces me to have to justify my comment, and which usually does very little good in the end.

However, by now, most people who read what I write already know me and what I think. If they don't like what I have said, they usually don't take the time to tell me, for which I am very grateful. This way I can spend more time teaching than defending, which often gets far more emotional than is healthy.

Recently, I departed from this strategy and made a comment about a certain secular political leader considered to be a spiritual threat by the Torah world. I also made a comment, tongue-and-cheek like, that may end up being quite significant as history comes to an end. Nevertheless, after being posted on someone else's site, my comments attracted the wrath of a reader, to whom I responded not once, but twice.

To make a long story short, his main "proof" against my stating that politician X was bad spiritual news for the Jews of Eretz Yisroel was that many "Torah scholars" have sat together with this politician in the government. "Do you," he asked me somewhat contemptuously, "consider yourself wiser than them?"

So, I tried to explain to this reader, who was not a regular reader of mine, that this cannot be taken as tacit approval of politician X. On the contrary, I told him, these Torah scholars would much rather have not joined forces with this politician and his colleagues, but were forced to as a result of political maneuvering. In the K'nesset, the strangest of relationships are created when each party with seats jostles to secure funding for its own constituents, while giving support to the government trying to be formed.

Not only this, but there has been an active program since Day One of the new state to reduce the power religious groups wield in the K'nesset, and politician X has had a big hand in this. As a result, religious parties, in an effort to fend off or at least slow down the assault on the Torah world, have been forced to shore up the secular government in return for promises of constraint against Torah institutions. This is political fact.

However, it did not make a difference to the person filing his complaint. He clearly was a staunch support of politician X, and would not yield any of his position, in spite of the fact that history does not support his point of view. Instead, he just kept coming back to the point that "throughout this whole 'longest time' the Gedolei HaTorah continued to participate in his governments and thereby receive billions of shekels for their institutions."

Nothing happens by coincidence, and I believe that there is something to be learned from all that I experience. So, I began to wonder why I was subjected to such an opinion (aside from being reminded not to mention anyone by name in a negative fashion). And, the one thing that kept coming back to me was how this person insisted upon seeing the support of the secular government by Talmidei Chachamim as acceptance of men who clearly represent spiritual threats to the Jewish people today, justifying his position and acceptance of the political affairs of our current government.

As the expression goes, the Torah world is "caught between a hard rock and a wall." Not only is it forced to make unholy alliances with people whose lives are the very antithesis of Torah, but in doing so it gives off an entirely incorrect perception to those who don't know better, or don't want to know better. So many Jews, including religious Jews as well, not knowing the painful "cheshbon" behind such decisions, see capitulation as a "sell-out" of Torah ideals.

And it is THEN that one can start to appreciate what it means to be living in golus-exile.

SHABBOS DAY:

If you will not change from what I do, because of these occurrences, but continue to walk con-trary to Me, then I will also walk contrary to you . . . (Vayikra 26:23-24)

We have a problem today. We live in golus, but don't seem to notice it all that much. For thousands of years, we lived in fear of the gentile world. We did not know from day-to-day if we would be allowed to ply out a living in the same place or to just survive. It was VERY easy in those times to remember that we were in exile, and to long for redemption.

But not today. Today, redemption is conveniently theoretical, like a legend from the past. A lot of people today live with legends from their nation's past, and they make great stories during sentimental moments. But, come Monday morning, all of them put on a suit and tie and head off to work like the rest of the Americans, Canadians, British, etc., and merge their cultures with that of their host nation.

Even the Torah world has come into its own. We now have beautiful and well-stocked shuls and study halls on foreign soil, providing a wonderfully convenient spiritual element to support a wonderfully comfortable physical lifestyle in exile. "Comfort" and "exile," once extreme oxymorons have come together in a unity that can only spell disaster for the Jewish people. Perhaps the negative turn of events for the Jewish people is already a function of that.

A physically comfortable Torah lifestyle is perfectly fine if we are talking about *achishenah*-hastening the *geulah*. To do as the Talmud says: anticipate redemption (*Shabbos 30a*), means that we are discontent with a life in exile, and that in spite of all the materialistic comforts available to us we still can't smile quite right without a Temple and the return of the Divine Presence.

However, if we do not actively anticipate redemption by looking forward to it and trying to participate in it to some degree means to accept exile as a form of redemption, a big spiritual no-no for a Jew, ANY Jew. Then, from Heaven's point of view, the materialism does not seem like a not-to-holy means to a holy end, but an obstacle along the path to the completion of Creation.

That is why, it seems, we always end up losing our wealth everywhere we have settled down. It might take a couple hundred of years to do so, but eventually it has happened. Like *Iyov* said, "G-d gives and G-d takes" (*Iyov 1:21*), and just as we began exile in poverty, we have usually closed it out in poverty as well.

However, the transformation is rarely an overnight process. G-d has patience behind measure and gives plenty of warning before lowering the boom, as discussed in this week's *parshah*. Why, just look at how many phases of punishment are mentioned in this week's reading, each one designed to wake us up to the fact that we are living in exile and ought to yearn for the redemption.

The question is, how do you know? How do you know when some negative event is not just some passing situation, but an actual wake-up call to the reality of exile? How are we supposed to figure out that Heaven is telling us, "Listen up folks! You're in exile, remember? You're supposed to be pained by that fact, and yearning for redemption . . . You know, the Temple . . . the return of the *Shechinah* to the Jewish people, etc.?"

For starters, we can ask a simple question, "Is there a solution to the problem?" For example, how can *Gedolei HaDor* stop making up the government in order to save Torah from being weakened, and at the same time stop giving the wrong impression to bystanders about how they feel? Personally, short of *Moshiach* coming and transforming the political situation, I have no idea.

Here's another pressing example as well: *Shidduchim*. Just about everyone wants to get married, and in the Torah world, it is a *mitzvah* and the community thing to do. Once a boy or girl turns 18 in the Orthodox world, the clock starts ticking in a process that hopefully results in the finding of a worthy marriage partner within two years, if not less.

There have always been those who have taken longer, and in some cases, much longer. However,

for the most part, that boy and girl were brought together relatively quickly and to a good end. Not so much these days though.

Thank G-d, shidduchim are still being made and the wedding halls are still booked quite solid. However, there are more and more sad stories of good people not being able to find the "proper" shidduchim, for one reason or another, as red lights are going off in the community. The word "crisis" is being used quite a bit these days to describe this somewhat recent phenomenon that is making life seem less rosy that it did, perhaps, ten years ago.

And, unlike politics, distant or local, to which one can close their door, or even high rates of assimilation and intermarriage that take place in far away communities, knowing someone struggling year-after-year has an ability to emotionally drag other members of the community down the same depressing path. "You want so badly to help," someone vented to me, "but feel so helpless to do anything about it."

Ouch. And then there are all those suffering from problems in shalom bayis, pushing the divorce rate up in the Orthodox community like never before. Some say that this change just represents the willingness of women today to face down a problem that they might have been afraid to deal with in the past, for fear of being stigmatized. However, though this may true to some degree, there is no question that marriage today is trickier than it was in the past, a sign of our fast-paced and materialistic times. This is another sign of golus.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

The remainder of you will dwindle away as a result of your mistakes and the mistakes of your ancestors while living in your enemies' lands. (Vayikra 26:39)

The most obvious signs of exile are assimilation and intermarriage. In Egypt, within the course of three days, four-fifths of the Jewish population was lost as a result of the Plague of Darkness. That's 12,000,000 Jews gone basically overnight, because they had not desired to leave Egypt, as the Midrash says. A staggering number!

Much later on in history, somewhere between 1942-45, Hitler, y"s, murdered 6,000,000 Jews, about half of the world's Jewish population at the time, most of whom had been spread throughout Europe. Not only is the number staggering, but so was the means and efficiency by which men were able to do such atrocities to other human beings, not to mention the obsessive hatred that fueled the Nazi death machine in the first place.

Today, the number is four-fifths again. But this time it is not a number of physical deaths, as a result of some Divine plague or the wanton hatred of other human beings perpetrated against the Jewish nation. This time it is a number of spiritual deaths, prompting many to call the present situation of assimilation a "Spiritual Holocaust."

That's four out of every five Jews assimilating, of which one out of every two marries a gentile. Over

the years, that has motivated some to actively pursue kiruv rechokim (outreach programs) to try and stem the tide of assimilation. There has been great success, in as much many inroads have been made into the secular Jewish community, but to date, the rate of kiruv is still no match for the rate of assimilation.

For, to help a Jew rediscover his or her roots and return to Torah in a "healthy" manner, it takes a lot of money, many programs, plenty of paid staff, and about two years of time. And, the whole program of success is predicated on plenty of help from Heaven, which for one reason or another, doesn't always seem forthcoming.

On the other hand, assimilation is a program that has been ongoing for years, and is well-established. Entire families assimilated so quickly, and marrying into other similar families, quite quickly produced entire generations of assimilated Jews as quickly as children can be born. It takes little money, no programs, and no staff to help a Jew assimilate.

Indeed, in the beginning, a lot of outreach money had to be spent to convince other religious Jews that they had a Torah mitzvah to do something about assimilation, and then they had to be trained how to make a difference. The investment is paying off, SLOWLY, and is not difficult to realize that it will take a VERY big miracle (to which, perhaps, the Internet has contributed much over the years) to mekarev the masses of assimilated Jews out there, many of whom have absolutely no interest whatsoever in anything Jewish!

Exile . . .

MELAVE MALKAH:

In spite of all of this, even though they live in the land of their enemies, I will not discard them, or detest them to the point of annihilating them, or void My covenant with them, for I am G-d, your G-d. For their sake, I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt before the eyes of the nations, to be their G-d. I am G-d. (Vayikra 26:44-45)

As Tosfos points out on the last page of Masechta Niddah, in the last tractate in the Talmud Bavli, even those prophets whose messages portrayed doomsday scenarios at the end of history, still liked to end of with comforting words. After all, in this week's parshah, after hurling threat after threat at possible future wayward Jews, the Torah ends off on a note of hope. So, it seems only appropriate that we do so as well.

In this world, success often involves so much physical effort that we tend to throw our arms up in the air and say, "It's not worth it!" before stomping off with dissolved resolve. And, if it's not the physical effort that makes the difference, then it is the billions of dollars that seem necessary to change the Jewish world so that it begins to resemble what it once did back at the beginning of our long and arduous journey to national completion.

The person to whom I referred at the beginning of this parshah sheet began his second letter with,

"Pinchas, I don't expect we'll change each other's viewpoints," and he was right. For, to do so would have taken many letters, a lot more give-and-take, and more than likely, a couple of in-person discussions as well. Any impact that I have personally had on other people's thinking has been over a long period of time, and after hundreds of pages of divrei Torah, or years of shiurim.

In fact, one of the reasons I lost my interest in speaking tours is because they required a lot of work on my part setting them up, and though I was well-received, thank G-d, and well-taken care of everywhere I went (people were unbelievably nice to me), the long-term impact has been quite limited. The people most moved by what I said were often ongoing readers of my material over the Net, while the rest of the people, after graciously thanking me for coming and after seemingly enjoying my talks, went right back to their same way of life after I left.

This is not to say that I don't believe in the concept of traveling from city to city to try and impact as many people as possible. It just means that I know that for kiruv to work on the scale that we dream about (and now I'm talking about kiruv rechokim and karovim, that is, amongst the Orthodox as well), it will take the following scenario:

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. Da'as (Godly understanding) will greatly increase, as will wisdom and purity. However, the world will continue as it is now regarding matters of physicality for forty years. Regarding this time it says: There is no difference between this world and Yemos HaMoshiach except for the oppression of nations (Brochos 34b). Obviously, then, all the laws and mitzvos of Torah will still be performed, just as they performed now by the righteous, the pious, and the holy, as it says in Yechezkel (36): And I will take you from the nations and gather you . . . And I will sprinkle pure waters upon you Š And I will give you a new heart and a new spirit . . . I will put My spirit within you, and I will make it so that you will follow My decrees and keep My judgments and do them. You will dwell in the land. (Yechezkel 36:23-28). (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 491)

Thus, in the end, the real golus is that of the Jewish mind. The physical part always follows from that. That exhaustive effort that it takes at this time to open the mind of another human being and enlighten him to the Truth, in order to empower him with free-will, is because of the lack of Da'as in the world. In that respect, we're all spiritually handicapped, spiritually-challenged, trying to inspire ourselves to do that which ought to come naturally to all of us.

It is Da'as that can change anyone on the spot, in a moment. At this point, to access it, one must spend time, energy, and often a lot of money. But days are coming, to quote the prophet, when one will merely need to "breathe" it in, and spiritually grow from one level to the next without obstacles or any form of exhaustion. Today's great absence of Da'as is just a harbinger of some event, destined to happen soon, to once and for all fill the world with Da'as Elokim-G-dly knowledge capable of finally righting all the wrongs of history.

I, for one, hope that time is very soon, and peaceful for that matter.

Chazak!

Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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