

# WHO BY FIRE, WHO BY WATER

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

## FRIDAY NIGHT:

*After seven days, the waters of the Flood came upon the earth. In the six hundredth year of Noach'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. (Bereishis 7:10-11)*

The Midrash asks why G-d surrounded all the lands of the world with masses of waters, and it answers: In order that the people will be afraid to sin before Him, lest he cover them with the waters of the sea (Bereishis Rabbah 5:6). In 5765 we were witnesses to just how easily this can happen and when it does, the damage is enormous.

At the beginning of 5766 we were re-introduced to the devastating power of earthquakes, as the number of dead in Pakistan and its surrounding areas at the time of writing this parshah sheet, exceeded 30,000 people. THIRTY THOUSAND PEOPLE, dead just like that, while in Guatemala a hurricane-induced landslide buried over 1,400 people alive, turning the destroyed village into a mass grave.

You are reading this parshah sheet after Succos, but it was written prior to Yom Kippur. Personally, I found that the words of U'nesaneh Tokef from the Yomei Norayim prayers, have a much more powerful and immediate meaning this year as we recall that it is at this time of year that G-d decides who will live and who will die, and by what means.

According to one chart, between the years 1952 and 1991, a period of 40 years, the most amount of damage resulting from floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes, over a given four year period during this time never exceeded 25 billion dollars. Between 1992 and 1996 alone, the combined damage was 95 billion dollars, a 300 percent increase. This calculation was before the tsunami in Indonesia, the earthquakes in Turkey, Iran, etc., the hurricanes of the last few years, and the recent earthquake in Pakistan.

As to why earthquakes happen, the Talmud writes:

What are zevaos? Rav Kattina said: A rumbling of the earth. Rav Kattina was once going along the road, and when he came to the door of the house of a certain necromancer, there was a rumbling of the earth. He said, "Does the necromancer know what this rumbling is?" He called after him, "Kattina, Kattina, why should I not know? When the Holy One, Blessed is He, calls to mind His children who

are plunged in suffering among the nations of the world, He lets fall two tears into the ocean, and the sound is heard from one end of the world to the other, and that is the rumbling." Rav Kattina said: "The necromancer is a liar and his words are false. If it was as he says, there should be one rumbling after another!" He did not really mean this, however. There really was one rumbling after another, but the reason why he did not admit it was so that people should not go astray after him. Rav Kattina, for his own part, said, "[G-d] claps His hands, as it says, 'I will also clap My hands together, and I will satisfy My fury' (Yechezkel 21:22)." Rav Nosan said, "[G-d] emits a sigh, as it is said, 'I will satisfy my fury upon them and I will be eased' (Yechezkel 5:13). And the Rabbis said, 'He treads upon the firmament, as it says, 'He gives a noise as they that tread grasps against all the inhabitants of the earth' (Yirmiyahu 25:30)." Rav Acha bar Ya'akov says, "He presses his feet together beneath the Throne of Glory, as it says, 'Thus says the L-rd: the heaven is My Throne and the earth is My footstool' (Yeshayahu 66:1)." (Brochos 59a)

Well, maybe back then, perhaps. Back then, things happened because G-d made them happen. Events such as floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, and earthquakes were Divinely-scripted messages.

Even in post-Temple times, because the Talmud was redacted as late as 499 CE, some 1,500 years ago, and the redactors didn't seem to insert in the text or add as a footnote: This was only true in earlier times, when Divine Providence was much more apparent. However, in our times of hidden Divine Providence, long after prophecy has ceased, natural disasters convey little in terms of Divine response. Thus, our only line of response can be sympathy for those who have been affected and an outpouring of national aid.

Yet, somewhere in history since that time, someone of great authority must have written that, because that it is certainly the way of the world today, including the Jewish people, in the way they respond to these disasters. Long gone are the days of Divinely-directed Noachide floods, and they say, "if they ever occurred at all."

### **SHABBOS DAY:**

*"It shall come to pass on that day, on the day that Gog shall come against the Land of Israel," says the L-rd, G-d, "My fury shall rise up . . . And, in My jealousy, in the fire of My anger, I have spoken - surely on that day there will be a great shaking in Eretz Yisroel. The fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field, and all the creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the people who are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at My Presence; the mountains shall be destroyed, the steep places shall fall, and every wall will fall to the ground." (Yechezkel 38:18-20)*

This was written thousands of years ago, in the good ole days when G-d was still speaking to man directly. This is pure prophecy, not an opinion of some later day would-be prophet, and if this had happened in Yechezkel's time, you could be sure that it was G-d speaking, and that to act otherwise would be nothing short of suicide.

Except that Yechezkel was not talking about his time. He was delivering a message about a future

generation, very far in the future from his time, a generation that would have to survive the final stages of history, and the final battles in the War of Gog and Magog. It was too early in his time to mention the names of the countries that might be involved, for example, America, England, Russia, or even the Arab states.

(Additionally, it would take away free-will from the generation whose existing countries' names match those of the prophecies of yesteryear. Therefore, Yechezkel, and the other great prophets of his time, just referred to them in a generic manner, simply calling them "Gog.")

So, CLEARLY, at some point in time since, as many today seem to assume, natural disasters stopped being direct messages from G-d, they will once again become Divinely-tailored events meant to have a direct impact on the history of mankind, direct responses to the actions of those who perpetrate evil, especially against the Jewish people.

Who will be, or perhaps already is, Gog?

This is an answer we may only know after the fact. But in the meantime, what we do know for sure, according to the prophecy, is that:

". . . Gog shall come against the Land of Israel," says the L-rd, G-d . . .

America already did that. And, so did Pakistan:

NEW YORK, Sept 18: In the first ever address to a Jewish congregation by a Pakistani head of state, President Pervez Musharraf assured America's powerful Jewish community that he would take steps towards normalization of ties with Israel if the Middle East peace process moved forward. Linking Pakistan's recognition of Israel to the establishment of a Palestinian state, the president said: "Peace process progresses towards the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, we will take further steps towards normalization and cooperation, looking to full diplomatic relations." In his speech to the American Jewish Congress . . . He qualified his offer of relations with Israel to the granting of rights to the people of Palestine and said that the Pakistani nation had a deep sense of sympathy for the Palestinian people and their legitimate aspirations for statehood.

Clearly, nothing is conclusive here, but the prophet did add:

"My fury shall rise up . . . And, in My jealousy, in the fire of My anger, I have spoken - surely on that day there will be a great shaking in Eretz Yisroel."

Is this literal or are we really in for an earthquake here? Surely G-d does not intend to destroy Israel and its infrastructure as a punishment for the nations of the world for having done the same thing. That's the trouble with prophecy, it's ambiguous and subject to interpretation and look-back verification.

The fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field, and all the creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the people who are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at My

Presence; the mountains shall be destroyed, the steep places shall fall, and every wall will fall to the ground."

Hasn't this begun already? Are we physically entering the period described by the prophet, but with a mentality that belongs to pre-Gog and Magog? Never forget how four-fifths of the Jews in Egypt just couldn't accept and adjust to the new program, and instead, died in the Plague of Darkness, or how we stayed too long in Spain, and even longer in Europe.

Do we dare simply cope only with the present, or do we now wonder about the future and ask, "What's next?"

### **SEUDOS SHLISHIS:**

*He sent Yehudah ahead to Yosef to prepare for their arrival. (Bereishis 46:28)*

Allow me to share an insight, what might be called a chidush (a new idea). Many Jews know that the Jewish people are waiting for Moshiach, but not all know that we are waiting for two of them, Moshiach Ben Yosef and Moshiach Ben Dovid.

Why must there be two? That is the way it has always been ever since Yosef HaTzaddik preceded Yehudah, the ancestor of Moshiach Ben Dovid down to Egypt on behalf of the Jewish people. It seems as if the redemption process is a one-two punch type of an idea, where Moshiach Ben Yosef is necessary to clear the path for Moshiach Ben Dovid, who will become the king of the Jewish people and of the world, for that matter.

Curiously enough, there is a tremendous amount of Torah literature regarding Moshiach Ben Dovid, but very little discussing Moshiach Ben Yosef and his role in the redemption process. So-much-so that even many learned people think only about one Moshiach, the final one, since he is only one described in any detail in the Talmud and its commentaries.

One work in particular devoted somewhat to the topic of Moshiach Ben Yosef is Kol HaTor, purportedly the teachings of the Vilna Gaon to some of his closest and most trusted students. I say purportedly because there is great controversy in the yeshivishe world as to whether or not the GR"A actually wrote Kol Hator, primarily because of the emphasis on making aliyah and participating in the Moshiach Ben Yosef part of redemption.

It is interesting as to how the one work that deals with such a hidden topic can make it into mainstream Torah literature, even though it seems as if some kind of conspiracy is keeping the work from gaining the recognition it truly deserves if it is really from the GR"A. And, indeed there must be some spiritual barrier, for if Moshiach Ben Yosef is the path to Moshiach Ben Dovid then, the Sitra Achra, the Opposing Angel destined to be removed from the world once the Final Redemption occurs, has to do whatever he can to delay Moshiach Ben Yosef from coming.

This is what the Arizal explained. He revealed that when it comes to matters of the redemption

process, the only way to succeed is by fooling the Sitra Achra, by giving him the impression that what is happening is actually contra-redemption. Like Lot fathering sons from his daughters, like Yehudah taking Tamar, or like Boaz performing yibum with Rus the Moabitess. This is also why Avraham was born from Terach, and why Dovid HaMelech's ancestry was so murky in his time.

And, as I have said before, it is probably why the modern State of Israel was founded by people who had no desire to associate themselves with any of the ultimate goals of the Jewish people. It fits the pattern perfectly.

We have so many hiccups in our long history that it is a proof of Torah itself; who would make up so many embarrassing moments about themselves? But, herein lie lessons to the wise who want to help with the redemption process without becoming the target of the Sitra Achra, that has even managed to inspire mass burnings of the Talmud and other major Torah works, and much, much worst.

It would not surprise me one bit to find out that he is behind the controversy over Kol HaTor as well, keeping many Jews from delving into its incredible instructions for facilitating the process of geulah. "Hey," the Sitra Achra mocks us, "you can talk about Moshiach Ben Dovid all you want, because he ain't going to come until Moshiach Ben Yosef comes, who most of you know nothing about, thanks to me and the controversy I have created regarding seforim like Kol HaTor!"

Having said that, perhaps we can find a little more about Moshiach Ben Yosef from the very pages of the Talmud, not by what Chazal said, but by what Chazal didn't say.

### **MELAVE MALKAH:**

*In that day will I cause the horn of the House of Israel to bud forth. (Yechezkel 29:21)*

If anyone knew the Sitra Achra and how he works, it was the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud. And, if anyone wanted to initiate geulah, it was the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud. The question was, how to do the latter without arousing the former, for Chazal knew that if they spoke about Moshiach Ben Yosef in any instructive way, the Talmud would be obliterated. History proved them right somewhat just by what they wrote about the gentile world.

Yet, on the other hand, the information had to be available to those who could use it throughout the generations in order to facilitate redemption. So, perhaps, like with the case of the Midrash which acts like clothing to hide the principles of the Oral Law from those for whom it was not meant, Chazal found a way to talk about Moshiach Ben Yosef and his time without actually doing so.

How's did they do that?

By talking about what Moshiach Ben Dovid is not, or when he won't come.

For example, the Talmud says:

Reb Chanina said: Ben Dovid will not come until a fish is sought for an invalid and cannot be procured, as it is written, "Then will I make their waters deep, and cause their rivers to run like oil" (Yechezkel 32:14); and it is written, "in that day will I cause the horn of the House of Israel to bud forth." (Yechezkel 29:21)

Rebi Chama bar Chanina said: Ben Dovid will not come until even the pettiest kingdom ceases [to have power] over Israel, as it is written, "He shall both cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and take away and cut down the branches" (Yeshayahu 18:5); and this is followed by, "in that time shall the present be brought unto the Lord of hosts of a people that is scattered and peeled" (Yeshayahu 18:7).

Zeiri said in Rebi Chanina's name: Ben Dovid will not come until there are no conceited men in Israel, as it is written, "For then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride" (Tzeephaniah 3:11); which is followed by, "I will also leave in your midst an afflicted and poor people, and they shall take refuge in the name of the L-rd" (Tzeephaniah 3:12).

Rebi Simlai said in the name of Rebi Eleazar, son of Rebi Shimon: Ben Dovid will not come until all judges and officers are gone from Israel, as it is written, "And I will turn my hand upon you, and purely purge away your dross and take away all your sin; and I will restore thy judges as at first" (Yeshayahu 1:25). (Sanhedrin 98a)

There are many others like these, and in most cases, one might despair, for such scenarios seem far off in the distance making the likelihood of Moshiach Ben Dovid's arrival very unlikely without some kind of dramatic turn of events.

Unless, the point of discussion is not Moshiach Ben Dovid, but in fact, his predecessor Moshiach Ben Yosef, as if to say that he can, and will come before these results are achieved, specifically to cause them to happen in order to hasten the arrival of Moshiach Ben Dovid. Thus, when the Sitra Achra learns this section of the Talmud, he will feel secure in knowing that nothing life-threatening for him is being discussed, when in fact it is.

It reminds me of the time when at the height of the Spanish Inquisition, the Morranos had a burning desire to hear shofar blown on Rosh Hashanah, which would have certainly blown their cover. It happened to be that the leader of the Spanish orchestra was a Morrano himself, and he devised a plan to pay tribute to the music of different cultures in a special concert to be held on Rosh Hashanah.

After presenting the music of other cultures first, the orchestra leader blew the shofar as a tribute to the music of the Jewish people, but it was really for the sake of the mitzvah of all the Morranos there - and right in front of the heads of the Inquisition! No one caught on, and the rabbis have said that never before has the Sitra Achra been as outwitted as he was that day.

Perhaps, but no one knew better how to fool the Sitra Achra than Chazal; there are sections of the

Talmud that are perfect examples and instructions to us. For, though Moshiach Ben Dovid may seem far off, there can be no more dramatic turn of events than Moshiach Ben Yosef, who can be here right now, paving the way so that Moshiach Ben Dovid can finally come.

*Have a great Shabbos,*

*PW*

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Text

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