

A WARNING

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

God told Moshe, "Speak to the kohanim ..." (Vayikra 21:1)

When the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center took place on September 11, 2001, one of the first things to occur was a closing of the U.S. borders; no one came in and no one went out. There had been people actually sitting on airplanes at the time of the attack, ready to leave for other countries, including Israel, and they were told instead to disembark and make plans to stay in the United States a while longer. The U.S. is certainly not the worst country in which to be "trapped" like that, but still, it is somewhat unsettling when you have to remain anywhere against your will.

For some of us, it was a warning. Not the kind of warning, mind you, that you might think it was, but a warning nonetheless. For, it wasn't only about how vulnerable America is to major terrorist attacks on its own soil; people have been speaking about that for years now. Rather, it was a warning about how quickly a major event can occur in America, or anywhere else around the world for that matter, and about how such an event can close borders to travel, stranding Jews in countries against their will. However, 9-11 passed, the Americans cleaned up the mess, and their borders opened to travel once again, albeit with more intense security. But then again, it had only be a warning, not yet the real thing, allowing Jews to plan for the future, and leave already if they can. However, the next time it happens it may not be only a warning, but the real thing, which is why the current epidemic of Swine Flu is reason for concern.

At this moment in time, everything is still quite uncertain. The Swine Flu, which apparently originated out of a small village in Mexico, is spreading faster than other viruses have in previous years. However, the question is, how much faster, and how much further? Will it go from epidemic to pandemic, God forbid, as WHO is warning?

If that happens, and the world has difficulty controlling the spread of the deadly virus, countries around the world will be forced to close their borders, limiting or stopping international travel altogether for the duration of the epidemic, until it is once again under control. At such time, even should Jews throughout the Diaspora decide it is time to return to Eretz Yisroel, they will be unable to for a new reason, beyond those that have existed until now, such as terribly deflated real estate markets abroad, and a booming one in Israel.

After all, everything is a function of Hashgochah Pratis. Just as the attack on the Twin Towers was a function of Divine Providence, (check out:

<http://www.earthfiles.com/news.php?ID=1555&category=Science>), and had exactly the impact that Heaven wanted it to have, regardless of man's involvement, likewise is this new epidemic a function of Hashgochah Pratis. It will do whatever damage it is meant to do, and stop only when Heaven deems it is time. It is happening for a reason, and it will have its desired effect, no matter what we do or don't do.

All punishment comes to the world because of the Jewish people. (Yevamos 63a)

I am not predicting that this will happen, just wondering. Why? Because of the following midrash:

There is a tradition that, at the time of the arrival of Moshiach, wonderful things will happen for Jews everywhere. On the actual day that they arrive from the Diaspora ... the walls of Jerusalem will be replaced. It will also be the day of the re-building of the Temple, which will be built from exquisite stones and gems. Once the dead are resurrected, they will become transformed and will have very lofty natures. However, the same type of transformation will occur for the ... Jews who remained alive [in Eretz Yisroel], and their bodies will be like that of Adam HaRishon before his sin, and like that of Moshe Rabbeinu. They will become so spiritual that they will be able to fly like eagles, which will astound the redeemed exiles. Upon witnessing this, the Diaspora Jews will become upset, and they will complain to Moshiach, Are we not Jews like them? Why do they merit to fly and live in an elevated spiritual state, and not us? However, Moshiach will answer them, "It is quite well known that God works measure-for-measure. Those who lived in the Diaspora and made efforts and sacrifices to elevate themselves by moving to the Holy Land merited purity of soul. They were not so concerned about their finances and health. They traveled over vast lands and crossed seas, not paying attention to the possibilities of drowning, being robbed along the way, or being taken captive by some strange foreign ruler. Being that they placed priority of their spirit over materialism and physicality, they merit, measure- for-measure, to be elevated to this lofty spiritual plane. On the other hand, you who also had opportunities to go up to Israel, but remained hesitant and reluctant, enamored instead with your materialistic status, making materialism a higher priority than spiritual growth, therefore, measure-for-measure, remain physical ... However, for those who valued their soul most, they will be transformed into supernal beings and will be led into the earthly Garden of Eden. (Tuv HaAretz: Praise Of Those Who Dwell In Israel At The Time Of Moshiach)

In other words, at the time of the arrival of Moshiach, it seems that there will have been Jews who had made aliyah in advance of his arrival, and those who will have made it to the Holy Land only after he restores order to the world.

The Malbim implies something similar:

At the end of their exile, the oppression will be removed from them, and they will be joyous because they will be on the peak of the nations. The gentiles will give them honor and they will be their heads, instead of being disgraced and lowered amongst them as they were at first. Ya'akov will be the masses of the people, and the lesser amongst them; Yisroel are the great ones. The joyousness

from being at the peak of the nations will be Ya'akov's only, and not Yisroel's, because they will want to return His Presence to Tzion. However, at that time they will "announce" and publicly proclaim, and "praise" God when they say, "O God, save Your [righteous] people, the remnant of Yisroel," because they will want the true salvation of the ingathering of the exile and return to Tzion. Then it will be like that, that God will return them: Behold, I will bring them ... (Malbim, Yirmiyahu 31:6-8; q.v. v'Tzahalu B'Rosh HaGoyim) There are other similar sources, and because of them, whenever I see something occur in history these days with the potential to limit the movement of Jews, as happened in Europe in advance of the Holocaust, when countries closed their borders to fleeing Jews, I worry. Call it paranoia, but given Jewish history, I think it is a justified paranoia. As the expression goes, "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me," and we have already been fooled so many times before.

One of the reasons why it concerns me so much, aside from the obvious dangers involved in being caught in the wrong countries at the wrong time (see this week's issue of "Connecting The Dots"), is because of the following midrash on this week's parshah, which says the following:

The Holy One, Blessed is He, showed Moshe how Shaul and his sons would fall by the sword (I Shmuel 31:1). Moshe said to God, "The first king will be pierced by a sword?!" God answered him, "You're asking me? Speak (emor) to the kohanim." Moshe complained, "But the death of Shaul will be a profanation of the Name before the nations," and he begged, " 'Please let me cross ...' (Devarim 3:25) and rectify him so that he won't sin through the killing [of the priests] in Nov (I Shmuel 22:6) [and] Achimelech [Kohen Gadol in Nov]..." (Yalkut Reuveini, Emor 2)

What the Midrash means is that when Shaul HaMelech had all the kohanim of the City of Nov executed for helping the fleeing Dovid HaMelech, he created a very strong prosecution against himself and his family in Heaven. When later, he fought his final battle down on earth, the deaths of the kohanim worked against him, and he was therefore killed in battle with his sons, in spite of the profanation of God's Name that such an end created. Why? Because, says the Midrash, Shaul HaMelech had shown restraint in an earlier incident when he did not execute the king of Amalek immediately upon capture, as he was supposed to have done. And, if he could show restraint before a reviled enemy of the Jewish people such as the king of Amalek, how much more so should he have shown mercy to an entire city of kohanim!

Therefore, explains the Midrash, since Shaul HaMelech had shown no compassion to the kohanim when they needed it, he himself received no compassion from Heaven when he needed it. As a result, Shaul HaMelech and his heroic sons died horrible deaths that day on the battlefield at the hands of the enemy, resulting in a very dark moment in Jewish history. The lesson is profound, and scary at the same time. The Midrash teaches us about how for every excuse we'll have on our final day of judgment for not having done this mitzvah or that mitzvah, God will show us how, when it came to our own personal pleasures and mandates, we overcame similar obstacles, such as a lack of time, or a lack of money, etc., to do what our hearts were set on doing. Our commitment to

achieve what was important to us will incriminate us when it comes to the things we should have done, and didn't, or the things we shouldn't have done, but did.

Hence, the reason for my concern. Though millions of Jews live in Eretz Yisroel these days, thank God, millions still remain scattered throughout the Diaspora, particularly in America. History is winding down, and once again the world is turning anti-Jewish, and this time we are not talking about one country (Egypt), or one continent (Europe), but the entire world! However, like in the story of Yonah, who slept soundly in the hold of the ship during a deadly storm, the Jewish people, today, are asleep as well.

We need a change of attitude, meaning that too many Jews today, especially in the Diaspora, feel no sense of urgency, or connection to the concept of redemption, or to Eretz Yisroel, or to the long term goals of the Jewish people. They are glued to the status quo, and they risk being in the wrong country at the wrong time in history, once again, with no safe place to go, mostly because they have no idea how to interpret current history in terms of the bigger picture of Jewish history.

It's an educational thing. We have the knowledge, compiled from mainstream sources, some known, some less known, and history itself. We have the means to deliver it, and to teach it, in order to change the way of thinking of so many misinformed Jews, so that many more can be on the same page as God at this very late and crucial stage of history. Actions may speak louder than words, but intentions count for a tremendous amount in Heaven as well, and that, now, has to be lined up with Heaven.

How do I know that we have everything we need to engineer our own redemption, or at least to mitigate the tough one that seems to be coming our way? Because, aside from being a clever people, thank God, we are a constructive one, accomplishing so much good in such short periods of time, usually with excellence—when it suits our wants and desires, physically or spiritually.

However, how incriminating. And, dangerous, for if we slip into a period of Divine decree, putting us in need of Divine mercy, our past accomplishments may stand before God and accuse us, demanding that we don't get the mercy that we will need. We're not there yet, hopefully. So, why not take advantage of our God-given genius and resources now, while we have the time to do so, to create the proper attitude we need at this time of history to at show God that, though we may not physically be where we ought to be at this critical time of history, we are spiritually.

Text

Copyright © by [Rabbi Pinchas Winston](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

Rabbi Winston has authored many books on Jewish philosophy (Hashkofa). If you enjoy Rabbi Winston's Perceptions on the Parsha, you may enjoy his books. Visit Rabbi Winston's [online book store](#) for more details! www.thirtysix.org