

ARE THE JEWISH PEOPLE READY FOR THE FINAL REDEMPTION?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

If you will deride My laws, and detest My judgments and not do all My commandments, but void My covenant, then I will do the following to you. (Vayikra 26:15)

I have never been to the camps. I want to go, or rather, I feel I must go. For a number of reasons. Some obvious. Some not so obvious. And, I am ashamed to say that I have not yet gone because I have not been able to afford to go, and wonder if I will ever get there. Too many other financial priorities make it difficult to justify putting out the money to make the trip.

But, I am also afraid to go. I am afraid what will happen to me if I do go. It takes me days just to get over a trip to Yad Vashem. Would I ever be able to get over a trip to Auschwitz or Treblinka? Would I have nightmares for years to come?

On the other hand, I recently spoke with some young adults who had just made the trip. And, I have to say, they were no worse for the wear. They went, they saw, they listened, they tried to imagine. But, at the end of the day, if they had been affected on any level that they should have been affected, it is so deep inside of them that it has yet to manifest itself in any obvious way.

I don't know the program, but I would assume, or at least hope, that one of the goals of taking people to the camps is to get them to ask the question, "Could such a thing ever happen again?" As someone who spends a lot of his time trying to avoid such disasters for the Jewish people, knowing how easily they can happen, I'd like to think that this is an underlying intention of such excursions into the dark past of European Jewry.

However, if it is, it has not shown up on the faces, or in the minds, of so many of the students who have gone on trips such as the March of the Living. Indeed, the impression that I have gotten in the past, from Jews who have seen first hand what they had previously only heard about regarding their European ancestors, is that they want to assume that the Holocaust was a singular event, unique to the German people, and not capable of occurring anywhere else in the world.

To quote the Spanish-American philosopher George Santayana (1863- 1952), "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." This is true for all of mankind, as history has proven. However, it is especially true for the Jew, especially if he chooses to forget his past, and the lessons it came to teach for the future.

This is what the Torah says explicitly:

Remember the days of the world; understand the years from generation to generation.
(Devarim 32:7)

As Rashi explains, this means looking at what went wrong for mankind in the past, and fixing the mistake to avoid the same results. How much more so is this the case for the Jewish people since the giving of the Torah, which even predicts what Heaven's reaction will be if we don't comply with the word of God.

Sometimes I think the situation is hopeless. I look back at Egypt, and remain to be amazed that four-fifths of the Jewish people of that time died in the Plague of Darkness because they rejected Moshe Rabbeinu and his promise of redemption. Even after trying to understand the conditions that existed at that time for them, I still have difficulty accepting that SO MANY PEOPLE could be SO WRONG.

There will always be dissenters and splinter parties until Moshiach comes. Two Jews, three opinions, remember? But, 12,000,000 out of a population of 15,000,000?

And, were there no warnings about what was going to happen in Spain in 1492? Or, in eastern Europe in 1942? Hitler, y"s, began his ascent in the early 30s. Kristallnacht occurred in 1938. Why were we still around in 1942 to be shipped off to the camps and torturously worked and brutally murdered? Being so intelligent and so clever, how did we find ourselves so trapped?

Ironically, or perhaps tragically, the question is the answer: because we are so intelligent and so clever.

For, not only do Jews have good minds, thank God, they trust them as well. But, unfortunately, that can work to our disadvantage when it is at times when we really shouldn't. As the rabbis have taught, you cannot trust yourself until the day you die, which means that you have to always wonder if the way you see things is the only true way. Such cautiousness means less mistakes.

I think that this is the fundamental difference between the Chacham and the Evil Son in the Haggadah. The Evil Son has followed a path in life based upon his own ability to reason. Make no mistake about it: he is a clever fellow, who has reasoned what is relevant to do as part of the service of God in his day, rejecting the notion of the Pesach Offering because no one worships lambs of sheep anymore.

For that, we break his teeth, which has the same gematria of seichel, which means "mind," as if to say, "Abuse it and you lose it." And, amazingly, we further chide him by adding, "Had you been there, you wouldn't have gone out of Egypt!" Really? How do we know that for certain?

We know because what the Rasha is doing is exactly what the four-fifths who died in the Plague of Darkness did. Relying on their own minds to interpret the events of their day, as opposed to relying on the prophecy of Moshe Rabbeinu, they missed their stop, literally. The redemption was happening right before their very eyes, and they couldn't see it, so blinded were they by their own

way of thinking!

The Chacham, what does he say? He says, "I wasn't there, so fill me in. I don't understand, so tell me what I need to know. I want the BIG PICTURE, so I'm just going to sit back and listen for a while, rather than step forward, like my evil brother, and talk like the authority that we are not." What makes a chacham a chacham is that he knows when it is wise to play the fool.

So, we fill his request until the last detail, and teach him everything, the entire picture, THE BIG PICTURE. Had he been in Egypt, he would have been part of the one-fifth that left, the part of the Jewish people that could sense the redemption coming, even though, after seven plagues, it still hadn't occurred. They didn't necessarily understand the process, but that was even more reason to surrender to the Divine logic that flowed through Moshe Rabbeinu.

What about today? Today, the Jewish people (no, not just the Israeli people) are caught between a hard rock and a wall. To the east, there is the growing threat of a nuclear Iran that must be stopped at all cost, at least as far as the Jews are concerned. The only problem is that the mechanism to safely stop them does not yet exist.

On the other hand, to the west, the last remaining full ally of the Jewish people is becoming less so by the day, leaving the Jewish people more isolated than ever before over the last 70 years. There is tremendous pressure to appease the world, but what they expect from Israel is not only beyond reason, especially given who we have to deal with, it is suicidal. And, to date, there is no safe way out of that one either.

The world of the Jew today is not the same world of the Jew 10 years ago, and not just because the date has changed. The politics have dramatically changed. The world dynamics have dramatically changed. And none of the change has been in favor of the Jewish people. Now, the question becomes, will it get worse before it gets better?

In the meantime, the Jewish population of Israel continues to grow, as world Jewish populations continue to decline. In the meantime, Israeli technological advancement, which is also fueling a hot economy, continues to surprise, while the rest of the Western world struggles to get back on its economic feet once again. World-wide real estate prices are depressed, but in Israel, they are skyrocketing.

Something is going on here, and almost no one is the wiser for it.

Indeed, I just watched a remarkable video that was sent to me advertising a wonderful, relatively-new, Torah community somewhere in the States. It made me queasy, because it reminded me of the Spies all over again: "Can't we stay in the desert and build a great Torah community right here? We will be just as righteous, if not more so, because we'll be able to learn Your Torah and do Your mitzvos because we will be so materially satiated. We just won't be in Eretz Yisroel."

They were so sure of themselves that they thought God agreed with them, and were totally taken

aback when He expressed His great dismay. They thought that they only had to convince the people to want to stay in the desert, but not God Himself. Perhaps they thought that if enough of a majority didn't want to go in, God would have to bow to the will of the people, and give in.

After all, they had thrived in the desert. God had made it so. And, after 40 years in the desert, they had mastered life there, so why move on to a place that would upset the balance and make Torah life so much more difficult? The goal is the World-to-Come, and Torah and mitzvos is the way to get there. So what if we go straight from Torah to the World-to-Come without passing through Eretz Yisroel?

It was sound logic, sound human logic. Funny thing was that God took exception to their suggestion, and responded in the strongest of terms:

God told Moshe and Aharon, "How long must I put up with this evil congregation, which complains against Me? I have heard the complaining of the Children of Israel against Me. Tell them that, I, God declare that as I live, I will do to them as they have asked: anyone 20 years of age and older who was counted, and complained against Me, their bodies will fall in this desert." (Bamidbar 14:26-29)

There are those who say that the 600,000 males between the age of 20 and 60 who, in the words of the mishnah, tested God 10 times, never really paid their debt for the "6,000,000 tests." Apparently, the best Moshe Rabbeinu was able to do was push off the obligation, which, according to this way of thinking, returned in Mordechai's and Esther's time, in the form of Haman.

Redemption without a scratch means that they had been successful to lead a spiritual counterattack, which thwarted Haman's plans of the extermination of the Jewish people of his time, but not for good. Once again, the teshuvah had been only good enough to extend the period of payment, not cancel the debt itself.

This line of thinking says that this is why the Ten Martyrs in the Roman times died, and so spectacularly. The Debtor had returned once again, and the people, no longer capable of pushing Him off as they had been in previous generations had to make some kind of major payment in the form of 10 of the leading rabbis of their time. According to the Zohar, this fueled history until Yemos HaMoshiach.

Whatever that means, because, whether or not you hold by this theory, and make the connection across history, the Jewish people made a "payment" of 6,000,000 Jewish souls between 1942-1945. Obviously, from a mathematical standpoint the numbers are not exact, if we already made payments along the way. But, the point is still the point: the number 6,000,000 is a thread throughout Jewish history, and the Holocaust may have been the final payment.

The only question now is, where is Moshiach? Where is the Final Redemption? Why is there still anti-

Semitism and why is it growing daily, together with the Arab threat? And, why did we lose Gush Katif, and why are they poised to take away more, and even Jerusalem, God forbid! This redemption looks a lot like exile still, doesn't it? Why?

Because of God, or because of us? Not sure? There is a way to tell, and that is, by what is happening to the Jewish people. If history is not yet ready for a redemption, then life will go on for the Jew pretty much the same way it does for the gentile. When both history and the Jewish people are ready for a redemption, then it happens quite smoothly.

However, when history is ready for redemption while the Jewish people are not, then life becomes difficult, or worse, for the Jewish people. Like a parent who wants to leave but whose child does not, there is tension, a sense of impatience, and if need be, outright force to get the child moving too. It all depends upon the child, and what it takes to get him, or in this case, them, to at least consider moving on.

Chazak!

Text

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