

IN GOD WE TRUST

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

If you walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments, and do them, then I will give your rains in their season ... (Vayikra 26:3)

To this very day I have found it fascinating that "In God We Trust" is written on the U.S. dollar. Not that many give this much thought these days, or if they do, they think that it refers to the Federal Treasury, but still, it is a remarkable thing. What it is really is a throwback to a different period of American history, when people believed in the Bible enough to make it the basis of the American Constitution.

Perhaps because it is still there the American economy has thrived for over 100 years, and the U.S. dollar has been the benchmark for so long. However, all of that seems to be changing, and even a reference to the Ultimate Financier on their money does not seem to be enough to go against history, which raises nations to financial prominence for a time, and then lets them fall into financial oblivion after.

We are all feeling the impact of the sinking U.S. dollar, and the worst is yet to come, according to analysts. But over here in Israel, it is felt most by people who make money in the States and bring over to Israel to spend. Last year, when I cashed a check for \$250 I received almost NIS 1,000 in exchange. Last week, I received NIS 840 instead. Ouch.

Indeed, I write this in advance of leaving on a three-week, five-city speaking tour to promote my new book, NOT JUST ANOTHER SCENARIO 2, b"H, wondering for how much longer such trips will be feasible. It is harder to set up events, and whatever money I do make while traveling counts for much less when I get back home, b"H.

It does not seem as if this is a temporary problem either, which is why I am beginning to focus more on local teaching and getting paid in shekels instead. And, I am far from being the only one; I hear others talking the same way.

And then there are the people who want to buy apartments in Israel using American dollars. Ouch-ouch. Some have lost thousands, and sometimes tens of thousands of dollars just in the drop in the U.S.-Shekel exchange rate between the time they signed to buy the apartment and the time they cashed their dollars to pay for it. No one is talking hiccup anymore with respect to the U.S. dollar. They're all talking old age and worse.

Maybe it is time to remove "In God We Trust" from the dollar. I mean, how is this going to look for God when the paper with which He is associated is worthless? Someone is bound to make a t-shirt saying something like, "See, I trusted in God and all I got was this lousy t-shirt." Religious people will have to start traveling incognito.

"You did?" Heaven might counter. "I mean, yes, it was on your money, but it wasn't on your lips or in your hearts. When was the last time," God can rightfully ask, "that you truly trusted in Me? Lip service doesn't count, not to save an economy and certainly not to save a nation from disaster, especially if it is slated to happen naturally."

Naturally? We just finished talking last week about how supernatural the natural reality really is. That is true. However, as is evident from everyday life, as supernatural as it appears, it appears, at least to man, to follow a natural course to such an extent that scientists and financial analysts can talk about cycles and repeating patterns. Hence, over time, civilizations tend to rise and fall, as naturally as the tide of the ocean.

Is it merely coincidence that most civilizations that fall tend to have been morally corrupt as well? Perhaps. After all, it seems that they all follow the same path. When fighting to establish themselves, they tend to be more humble being mostly focused on survival. However, after survival is established and they move into the prosperity stage, they tend to focus more on improving the living standard which, depending on the level of prosperity and often technology, tends to become over-indulgent.

As the distinction between the haves and the have-nots increases, so too does crime. Promiscuity seems to also follow in time, and before you know it, the civilization becomes detached from its humble beginnings and becomes morally corrupt, or even bankrupt. It just seems to rot from the inside, and soon after that, it begins to collapse from the outside as well. By the time the Mongols attacked the Roman Empire, it had been rotten to the core and full of hubris.

A natural cycle, or cause-and-effect as alluded to in this week's parshah?

In other words, let us say that a society sprouts and grows. And like many others before it, they decide to establish rules to regulate society and keep it on the straight-and-narrow. Perhaps, like the original architects of the American Constitution, they even turn to the Torah for direction.

However, unlike other societies, they stick to their guns. In other words, they do not follow the path of corruption that most nations follow, and even hundreds of years later they remain true to their constitution and society remains moral. Will they, in the natural course of events, suffer an attack or some other form of national destruction?

The answer is ...no. In fact, the Talmud speaks of a city in Eretz Yisroel that once existed where no one ever lied, and as a result, no one ever died. If someone wanted to die, he had to either lie, or leave the city (Sanhedrin 97a). I suppose that at some point they lost their integrity, because the city

no longer exists today.

That is what this week's parshah is saying. Even though miracles reduce free-will, and a society that lasted for thousands of years without falling a part would seem quite miraculous and therefore, reduce free-will, God is not bothered. On the contrary, He will find ways to set the situation up to make a supernatural situation seem natural enough to grant longevity to those who deserve it, while maintaining free-will for those who need it.

And, should this society not only spiritually maintain itself but even influence others around it until they too live on a significantly high level of spirituality, relatively-speaking, then that would actually usher in Yemos HaMoshiach, and do away with any need for free-will. That, according to the Talmud is what the following means:

Rebi Alexandri said: Rebi Yehoshua ben Levi pointed out a contradiction. It is written, "in its time [will Moshiach come]" (Yeshayahu 60:22), while it is also written, "I [the Lord] will hasten it!" (Ibid.). If they are worthy, I will hasten it; if not, [he will come] at the due time. Rebi Alexandri said: Rebi Yehoshua opposed two verses: it is written, "And behold, one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven" (Daniel 8:13), while [elsewhere] it is written, "[behold, Your king comes to you] lowly, and riding upon an donkey" (Zechariah 9:7). If they are meritorious, [he will come] with the clouds of Heaven; if not, lowly and riding upon an donkey. (Sanhedrin 98a)

The prophet was talking about two possible dates for the Final Redemption, *achishenah*, which means hastened, and *b'ittah*, which means in its time. The first one we earn by fulfilling the mandate of Creation early, and therefore it happens in an exciting and honorable way. The second one is imposed upon history when mankind fails to fulfill the mandate of Creation before the clock runs out, and occurs through difficulty, what is called the birth pangs of Moshiach.

They actually represent two tracks of history, the one with which we are most familiar during which nations rise and fall continuously, because man just misses the boat on the true purpose of life, and the one that this week's parshah dangles in front of our faces like a carrot on a stick:

If you walk in My statutes, and keep My commandments, and do them, then I will give your rains in their season, and the land shall yield her produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time, and you shall eat your bread until you have enough, and dwell in your land safely. (Vayikra 26:3-5)

Etcetera. And, it does not just mean for 500 years like the Roman Empire, or less, like the American one. It means forever, because such a perfect society perfects Creation and eliminates the need for any more free-will. Rather than be dragged down to Eisav's level, Eisav gets pulled up to Ya'akov's

level, who becomes a true Yisroel. The pattern of history is finally broken, and forever.

In the meantime, the pattern remains. Some empires last for several centuries, some for less. America may have meant well in the beginning, but it has strayed so far from the original intentions of its founding members. The fact that, at one point, the God mentioned on their money was the One Who made Creation and the gave the Torah, is highly significant. The fact that it now means something far more superficial, evident from the way God has been pulled from the classrooms and American society has become too open, is perhaps, at this point, even more significant.

Russia is red, the color of Eisav, and so is the Catholic church. However, America inserted blue into its national flag, the color of Yisroel, and like the Israeli flag, they added some stars. Perhaps, on some level, that indicated an attempt on some of Eisav's descendants' part to be a bit more like his twin brother's descendants, which is why they embraced the Bible and its message of morality when establishing the direction of American society.

However, though the blue remains in the American flag, it barely remains visible in American culture, indicating that it has gone the path of past empires, albeit a little earlier. And, quite frankly, Israeli society, which tends to hold onto the heel of Eisav rather than take the lead, may not be too far behind, God forbid.

Hopefully not. But, the way that some Israelis live, it almost seems as if they too want to inject some red into the white and blue flag. Though that may not happen physically, it cannot happen conceptually either, not at this late stage of history, and while the Arab world goes through upheaval. As history and the world transitions to Yemos HaMoshiach, we are going to need God on our side as much as possible.

The world has shown that we cannot trust it for our security. Though we may not go so far as to print our money, "In God we trust," at the very least, we have to print it on our hearts. The future and longevity of our society depends upon it.

Chazak!

Text

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