

# RIGHT THE WRONG

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

For some people who write commentaries on the weekly parshah, Parashas Shlach-Lecha comes around only once a year. For me, however, every week is Parashas Shlach, since I spend so much time writing and speaking about that which went wrong with the Generation of the Spies, and what we must do today to rectify the situation. What can I say that is new, even for me, after all these years?

Sometimes I avoid the issue altogether, and talk about another part of the parshah instead. However, that's like going to visit a doctor about a potentially fatal disease and focusing instead on a sore finger. Such a waste of opportunity—such a dangerous waste of opportunity, especially today. What to do?

However, there is a time-honored rule of public speaking that goes like this: When in doubt, tell a story, so I will.

The Talmud speaks of certain Jews who, anticipating the redemption from Egypt, left 30 years earlier than did Moshe Rabbeinu and the one-fifth that survived elimination during the Plague of Darkness:

They were the Bnei Ephraim, who counted [the years] to the end [of the Egyptian exile] and erred . . . (Sanhedrin 92b)

Apparently, they had counted the 400 years of exile foretold by God to Avraham from that time, when in fact, as Rashi explains, the proper starting point of the prophecy had been from the birth of Yitzchak, 30 years later. As a result, they left Egypt 30 years before the rest of the Jewish people, and were slaughtered in the process. Clearly, it had been a tragic mistake.

However, Jewish history is rarely straightforward, and those who treat it like it is end up being consumed by it. Sometimes one has to wait to see the true results of his effort, and very often the ones that immediately result are only temporary, satisfying some historical need that usually has to do with the issue of free-will.

In fact, all of Jewish history has been like this. The claim of being God's chosen people has not held up in the eyes of the world over the generations for one simple reason: Jewish suffering. "If you're the chosen people," they scoff, "why doesn't God take better care of you?"

The answer reveals an unsophisticated understanding of God, how He runs His world, and the role

of the Jewish people. But, enough Jews have also asked it without receiving any satisfying answers that we have lost many either to other religions, or to no religion at all. They didn't feel so chosen, especially after the brutal pogroms of Europe, and the Holocaust in more recent times.

The end, of course, will justify the means. Once Moshiach finally comes and rids the world of evil, it will be clear to everyone that the Jewish people had been right all along. Vindication will be ours, regret, theirs. Jewish history will finally make sense to all those surviving until that time, as all the pieces of the puzzle fall into their rightful places.

In the meantime, you have to kind of be a zealot to be religious today. The pressure from the outside world to modernize, and even from the inside, is very great to the point that some are only observing those aspects of Judaism that don't interfere with a Western lifestyle. Anyone who doesn't agree with them is labeled "extreme," or "Ultra-Orthodox," terms that imply, for many who are not of this category, misplaced zealousness.

"Extreme" is also a term being used to refer to Jews who refuse to capitulate to international demands to make "peace" with an Arab world that clearly has no desire to make it. Those who stand up for their land, and for the protection of their people, and are prepared to trust in God to help them survive what may come their way, are called "Extremists," when in fact those calling them this are the real extremists—extremely secular and extremely detached from Jewish history.

Perhaps, God works this way with individuals and the nation to test us, to make sure that we are acting altruistically. We know from the Talmud how important it is to serve God lishmah—for His sake, not our own. We know that even though we are the real benefactors of this attitude towards life, this is only true as if we act as if we're not. As the Talmud says, honor runs after those who run from it (Eiruvim 13b).

The point is, that when it comes to Jewish history, you can't always draw the correct conclusions from what occurs immediately after an event. How many times have good immediate results, down the road, soured and become a source of regret? How many times have negative immediate results eventually become a source of redemption? Far more times than we'll ever know at this stage of history.

Take the B'nei Ephraim, for example. Were they over anxious to leave exile? Apparently, yes. Did they leave Egypt too early? It certainly seems so. Yet, because of a strange twist of history, it turns out that they fared better than the Jews who left Egypt 30 years later with Moshe Rabbeinu. Almost every male between the ages of 20 and 60 who left "on time" died in the desert, and some even lost their portions in the World-to-Come. Even Moshe Rabbeinu, Aharon HaKohen, and Miriam did not make it to the Promised Land in their lifetimes.

However, with respect to the Bnei Ephraim, it says:

Rebi Eliezer, son of Rebi Yosi HaGalilee said: "The dead whom Yechezkel revived went up to Eretz

Yisroel, married wives and had sons and daughters. Rebi Yehudah ben Basira rose up and said: 'I am one of their descendants, and these are the tefillin which my grandfather left me from them.' " (Sanhedrin 92b)

This is a remarkable example of just how convoluted Jewish history can be, not because God likes to play games with us; He doesn't (Avodah Zarah 3a). Rather, history is interactive, and depending upon our free will choices and approach to opportunities of the generation, it will respond with whatever is necessary to further the goals of Creation, without interfering with our decisions, be they good ones or bad ones.

Of the 15,000,000 Jews who lived in Egypt at the time of the redemption, 12,000,000 chose to remain in Egypt rather than leave with Moshe Rabbeinu, and consequently, died in the Plague of Darkness. Of the remaining 3,000,000 that went out, together with an additional 3,000,000 Erev Rav, most of them complained in the desert, and seemed ready to run back to Egypt the moment the going got tough. Not a good score for the newly emerging Jewish nation.

However, apparently, the Bnei Ephraim seemed to have been set apart, very set apart. They seemed to have been the only ones willing to risk everything to leave exile and fulfill the prophecy made to Avraham Avinu of the fourth generation returning to the Land. In truth, they had been the ones that Moshe Rabbeinu should have led when the time for redemption came; their journey to Eretz Yisroel would have been different than the one the Torah actually relates to us .

However, to leave with the rest of the nation on time could have been disastrous for them. In this week's parashah, Caleiv bee-lined it right to the burial place of Avraham Avinu to prostrate himself on his grave, and to beg for Heavenly help not to be pulled into the evil plan of the 10 Spies. He actually had to worry about being made to buy into their point of view, because there is power in numbers. Perhaps the Bnei Ephraim, being amongst the rest of the nation, would have had a much greater difficulty remaining so zealous when the rest of the nation was talking about staying in the desert.

Admirable as their zealousness was, they could not take the Land earlier than the intended time. However, they were not to be stopped, since their feelings about leaving were so strong. Therefore, their history was put on hold: They died along the way, and were brought back to life, and allowed to pick up their dream of reaching the land of their ancestors where it left off, long after those who left Moshe Rabbeinu either died in Egypt in the Plague of Darkness or, because of one punishment or another, in the desert.

Recently, I was directed to a web site, religious in nature, against the modern State of Israel. Obviously, all religious Jews can't wait for the day when the country will be a Torah country, and the government will operate its affairs according to Torah law. No Torah observant Jews can accept the present-day situation as being ideal, when so much is done in the country that flies in the face of Torah.

However, whereas some reject the present reality of Eretz Yisroel completely, others see it as step

along the way to the final redemption, and have learned to work with the situation, to make the best of it, and to help move the country more in the direction of the Jewish ideal. Some, knowing concepts such a mirmah u'tachboles, even understand how and why God often brings about redemption through backdoor means.

The site, which condemns those who choose to see a path of redemption that runs through the presently existing State of Israel, uses the story of the Bnei Ephraim to push their point about what happens to Jews who pre-empt the proper date of redemption. Instead, they'd rather hand back authority of the country to the Arab population, and sit tight until Moshiach comes.

However, it is a small-picture, superficial approach to Jewish history. To be zealous for redemption can be a frustrating and often dangerous path. However, as the Talmud states, it's what a Jew supposed to be (Shabbos 31a). Many have already died, or been injured trying to make the Final Redemption a reality, but far more have died in the Diaspora, in the desert, ignoring the issue.

In another week or two, I will have published a new book called, "Drowning in Pshat: a deeper look at the final redemption." I wrote it based upon many deeper sources that most do not see, but which are crucial for making sense of Jewish history, especially current Jewish history. After thousands of years of exile, and terrible suffering throughout, it is important that we understand what it is that we do, and why, to prolong our own agony.

It is also based upon historical facts that point to incredible moments of Hashgochah Pratis—Divine Providence—that clearly show the hand of God in the formation of the present State of Israel, and how it was a necessary step along the path to redemption since we weren't taking enough of our own, all from a mainstream Torah perspective. It's already for sale in advance in my Online Bookstore ([www.thirtysix.org](http://www.thirtysix.org)), in softcover format or as PDF.

Yes, that was a plug for my new book at the end of a Perceptions, as much as I hate doing that, I did it more because of what the book is meant to do, than to sell it. It is meant to show how Jewish history took a wrong turn in this week's parshah, and how the rest of Jewish history has been about getting back on the main road once again. It has been about bringing an end to the tragic mistake of the Generation of Spies, which has continued now for millennia.

You can't do that without the proper sources. You can't do that with the relevant historical facts. It is one thing to be zealous for redemption, but it is something altogether different to understand where that zealousness is supposed to come from. And, as the book makes clear, we may have little time to right the wrong before it is righted through us, as opposed to because of us. So, yes, I have just plugged my new book, but the reader, and for Jewish history, and to try and mitigate what may be coming our way, God forbid, if we don't get back on track soon.

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