

INTERPRETING SIGNS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Then Ya'akov called for his sons and said: "Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you at the end of days." (Bereishis 49:1)

We have arrived at 2012. You know, the year that the Mayans predicted would be the last one, because they didn't refer to one after 2012. But, it is probably all just hype, a storm in a teacup as my English neighbor says. I think they just ran out of Inca. Just kidding.

Acharis HaYomim—the end of days—is a very fascinating topic. It is appropriate to discuss it here, because the end is near. The end of Sefer Bereishis, that is.

Though some people prefer to avoid it altogether, every culture seems to have embraced it, at one time or another, believing that history as we know it will come to end, and lead to something else. Whether it is mankind himself who will cause it to happen, some rogue meteorite, or even a massive solar flare, either way, most probably believe that the end will only be a transition to another period of history.

Of course, the Torah point of view is clear, though many Jews are not so clear about what it is. Some are even less clear about why it is even important to be clear about such ideas, and why Ya'akov Avinu felt compelled to share such information with his sons just before he died. Going over some of the more basic points may make that a little bit clearer, and what is called the "End of Days."

First of all, according to the Talmud, what we call Olam HaZeh—this world—is destined to last 6,000 years:

This world will last for 6,000 years, and for 1,000 it will be destroyed. (Sanhedrin 97a).

So, Armageddon is at Year 6000? No. According to Kabbalah, destroyed does not mean destroyed in the Armageddon, End-of-Days-type of way. Rather, it is more like what happens to adolescence when a person becomes an adult: he moves on. The previous period of time isn't destroyed, just left behind as life advances to more sophisticated stages.

Likewise, Kabbalah explains, at 6000, existence is elevated to a higher spiritual plane, and this world ceases to be as it presently is. Year 6000 marks the beginning of what is called Olam HaNefashos—the Soul World—in preparation for even higher spiritual planes of existence.

But, not before passing over the threshold of the Great Day of Judgment, which, apparently, is at the

end of the seventh millennium—not that conventional time will be operating then—at Year 7000. That is when we are judged for how we lived our lives—all of them—and it is decided whether or not we require additional rectification before assuming our eternal positions in the World-to-Come.

At that stage of existence, the body is no longer physical as we know it today. Just to reach Olam HaNefashos, the body will have to be more like a soul than a body, because after 6000 the world is more spiritual than it was for Adam HaRishon in the Garden of Eden before the sin. Death will no longer be a reality in Olam HaBah, which raises the issue, when does the resurrection of the dead take place, if there is no need for it after Year 6000?

The obvious but not-so-well-known answer: Before 6000, as the Leshem, quoting the Zohar, explains:

The duration from death to resurrection will be the same for everyone, but the time of death will not be the same for everyone, and thus the period of time of the deaths and resurrections for the entire generation will continue for a long period of time. However, righteous people who have died previously will resurrect immediately after the 40 years from Kibbutz Golios—the ingathering of the exiles. This is what it says in Midrash Ne'elam (Zohar, Parashas Toldos 140a): There will be many resurrections, and the duration of time will be, according to Rebi Yehudah, from 40 years after Kibbutz Golios, at which time the first resurrection will occur, and the resurrections will continue from then until the last resurrection for 210 years. According to Rebi Yitzchak, 214 years ... (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 4, Anaf 12, Siman 9)

Kibbutz Golios is not a term used with respect to the World-to-Come, because at that time, there will be no need to ingather Jewish exiles from around the world. There will be no Diaspora anymore after Year 6000, when the world is elevated to a whole new spiritual level. Rather, it is a term used by the Torah as follows:

And it will be, when all these things come upon you the blessing and the curse which I have set before you that you will consider in your heart, among all the nations where the Lord your God has banished you, and you will return to the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul, and you will listen to His voice according to all that I am commanding you this day you and your children, then, the Lord, your God, will bring back your exiles, and He will have mercy upon you. He will once again gather you from all the nations, where the Lord, your God, had dispersed you. Even if your exiles are at the end of the heavens, the Lord, your God, will gather you from there, and He will take you from there. And the Lord, your God, will bring you to the land which your forefathers possessed, and you will take possession of it, and He will do good to you, and He will make you more numerous than your forefathers. (Devarim 30:1-5)

Kibbutz Golios clearly belongs to our side of history, to this side of 6000, which means that Techiyas HaMeisim, the resurrection of the dead, also belongs to this side of Year 6000. Indeed, the Leshem says this specifically:

Likewise, Yom HaKippurim, which is the level of Binah, is the sod of the World-to-Come of the Seventh Millennium, of which we say, "the entire day that is Shabbos," as it says in Rosh Hashanah (31a). Therefore, Shabbos, Yom HaKippurim, and Purim, which allude to periods after Yemos HaMoshiach, to periods of the World-to-Come and to eternal lights, will remain [as holidays] in order to allow access to their lights and revelations of the future. However, all the [rest of the] holidays allude only to lights of rectification of Yemos HaMoshiach after the beginning of the time of Techiyas HaMeisim onward until the end of the 6000 years. (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 4, Anaf 12, Siman 10)

Elsewhere, he explains that the whole point of resurrecting our dead bodies is to restore them to their former glory, back before the first man sinned and caused the physicalization of Creation. Once, our skin was like light, not opaque and physical as it is now, and how it will have to be in order to get through the gate to the World-to-Come at 6000. In other words, the period called The Resurrection of the Dead has to be before 6000, because it is necessary to prepare us for after 6000.

According to the Zohar, the entire period of time allotted for Techiyas HaMeisim is between 210-214 years in advance of 6000. These are not the opinions of obscure rabbis, but of Rebi Yehudah HaNasi, the author of the Mishnah, and Rebi Yitzchak, a central figure of the same time period. They are, therefore, mainstream opinions, with which no one argues, at least not in the Zohar. As hard as this may be to fathom, that Techiyas HaMeisim may be only 14-18 years away, there really is no reason not to believe it.

And, according to the Zohar, that begins after 40 years of Kibbutz Golios, which makes the beginning of it 22-26 years ago, around 1986-1990. So, if Kibbutz Golios lasts 40 years, and Techiyas HaMeisim comes at its conclusion, then Yemos HaMoshiach—the arrival and reign of Moshiach—must be part of the period of time called Kibbutz Golios, of which there is only 14-18 years left, according to Rebi Yehudah and Rebi Yitzchak.

Hence, if ever a period of history was called Acharis HaYomim, it is ours. This week's parshah took place at the end of Ya'akov's days, in the year 2255, or 1506 BCE, but it is referring to the end of our days, some 3,517 years later. That may be hard to believe, but this is what the information says.

"But," some may say, "there is a 167 year discrepancy between the Jewish and Western dating systems. Even if the timeframe provided by the Zohar is correct, how do we know where we are, historically, within that timeframe?"

I've never quite understood why so much credibility has been given to the Western dating system when it comes to ancient events, given how that system began. It wasn't until Roman times that secular historians started to record history with any kind of accuracy, since doing so in the past could have been considered treason by ancient rulers, at least when it came to recording their political mistakes and military defeats.

Yet, as early as 2448, or 1313 BCE, the Jewish people were given the mitzvah of keeping track of the

months and years. And, the people who usually did this were the talmidei chachamim of society, not very likely to fudge the dateline. It is possible, but unlikely, given the fear of God for which they are known.

In any case, I dealt with this in my book, *Talking About the End of Days*. ArtScroll also dealt with the issue at the back of one of their history books. And all of this is before getting into the Kabbalah aspect that basically mandates that the Jewish approach to dating history is correct, and that we can assume that we are actually in the year 5772.

Even still, what difference does knowing this information make to any of us, that Ya'akov Avinu wanted to reveal it to his sons? The answer may be all the way back in Egypt, and back in time.

It is well known that 80 percent of the Jewish people did not leave Egypt with Moshe Rabbeinu, dying instead in the ninth plague of darkness. They thought that they could choose to stay behind in Egypt, and not go out with the Jewish people, as if remaining in Egypt had been an option. Perhaps it was, but not the way they had planned, for all of them died at that time, leaving behind only one-fifth to make the exodus from Egypt historical reality.

Many have asked why so many Jews would choose to stay behind in Egypt rather than leave with Moshe Rabbeinu and the rest of the nation. There are a few answers, one of which is that after witnessing eight plagues, and after watching Pharaoh relent each time, they found it hard to believe that the end was near. Even though Moshe Rabbeinu had told them that they would only leave after the tenth plague, still many found it too hard to believe that the redemption was at hand.

People act differently when they know what is happening is part of the final act. They start thinking about what's next, and what to do in the meantime. And, when it comes to Keitz HaYomim—the end of days—those are important questions to answer, since according to the prophets, the transition from our period of time to the next is not destined to be a smooth one. It already isn't.

Furthermore, we have a habit of getting caught in the storm. Historically, the Jewish people have usually been forced to go through bouts of anti-Semitism rather than flee them. Individuals have seen the writing on the wall and reacted to it in good time, but the masses have always, almost without exception, fared far worse. If Jews in 1938 knew that Kristallnacht had been the beginning of far worse to come, they might have fled with only what they could carry rather than lose everything in the years that followed.

Because God gives signs. Exiles do not come to an end overnight. They take time. Events develop, and as they do, they give us messages about where history is heading. That's the way Heaven works. God takes no pleasure in springing anti-Semitism on us and bringing exiles to an ugly and abrupt end. In fact, anti-Semitism occurs to avoid that. Unlike regular racism, anti-Semitism is Divine in origin, designed to inform the Jewish people that the present exile is coming to an end. That is the basis of a different book and seminar called, *Geulah b'Rachamim*.

Cutting to the chase, it means that Ya'akov Avinu wanted to give us the signs by which to recognize through the events of our day that history, as we know it, is coming to an end. He wanted to give us the signs so that we would not misunderstand the events of our time, so that we could use them to help us prepare for the end of days, and allow us to take advantage of the opportunities of our time. But, alas, he was denied the prophecy, and we, the signs.

However, the truth is, though we were denied the prophecy, we have not been denied the signs. The signs are still there. The fundamental difference is that we have to create the prophecy for ourselves, as a function of our own understanding of Torah and our connection to the national goals of the Jewish people. That is what provides us with the spiritual glasses necessary to properly interpret the physical vision, each person on his or her own level.

So, as everyone today looks at the situation facing the Jewish people and interprets it for themselves, they have to consider whether or not certain options are as optional as they seem to be. Back in the 1930s and 40s, we didn't seem to understand that idea very well, and paid a heavy price for it in the years that followed. Must we always make the same mistake, or can we finally learn from Jewish history, and see the signs as signs, and respond appropriately?

Text

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