

THEY DANCE TO GOD'S MUSIC

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

The Vilna Gaon, in his commentary on Megillas Esther, explains that the reason the Megillah tells us that Achashveros ruled from Shushan is so that we can have a better appreciation of the miracle God did for the Jewish people. It was a classic case of God bringing the conflict to the Jewish people, as opposed to having the Jewish people go out and fight their battle on foreign turf.

For, as the GR"A explains, Shushan had not been the official city of the king until Achashveros became king. He was forced to rule from there because he had made a huge throne for himself, fashioned after the one Shlomo HaMelech sat on. Shushan was the only city in which he could put such a throne, and this forced him to break with royal tradition and move the seat of rulership from Bavel to Persia.

It was as if God put the idea into his mind to make such a throne, so that Achashveros would be forced to establish himself in Shushan and rule from there. In fact He did, and the reason for this was because it was in Shushan that Mordechai, the main protagonist of the Purim story resided. It was a perfect example of what the Talmud, in Megillah, calls God making the "medicine before the illness."

Another example of this is the story of Chizkiah HaMelech and Sancheriv, found Sefer Melachim. Sancheriv, the king of Assyria, had gathered up what had been tantamount to the UN forces of his time, taking troops from all the surrounding nations and combining them into one massive army to conquer Jerusalem and the Jewish people.

After arriving in Jerusalem and laying siege to the city, Sancheriv and his 185,000 legions camped around the walled city of Jerusalem for the night in advance of attacking and destroying Chizkiah and his tiny defense force the next day. The stage was set for a terrible massacre.

However, not the one that Sancheriv had planned. Rather, during the night God sent a plague to destroy the ranks of his army, and by the next morning, Sancheriv was the one forced to flee for his life. An incredible miracle had occurred while Chizkiah, as an expression of his trust in God, slept that night, allowing him to wake up to a tremendous victory against all of the odds.

Sancheriv had gathered his massive army to march against Chizkiah HaMelech and his people. God had Sancheriv amass a huge army in order to bring them to Jerusalem so that Chizkiah HaMelech and his followers could witness an incredible miracle, and to see firsthand how God manipulates world history for the sake of Jewish history.

This is especially true when a keitz approaches, an end time in Jewish history by which time some aspect of redemption must be achieved. There have been trillions of people throughout history, and billions are alive today, but all of us exist, and have existed, as part of a master plan, a Divine master plan that is not open-ended, but rather one with pre-designated points by which certain things have to be accomplished on the path to fulfilling that Divine master plan.

Even the people who don't believe in the master plan, or even in the Master of that master plan, play a role, albeit unwittingly, in it. Indeed, the joke is on them, because though rejecting God may feel, on some level, as if the disbeliever is slapping God in the face, so-to-speak, he is, instead, 'cutting off his nose to spite his own face'. History has roles for atheists and agnostics, just as it has roles for antagonists, and God is quick to fill them with such people as part of His master plan—and to punish such people for making themselves so available to play such roles.

The point is that no matter how far man tries to deviate from God's plan for history, he never can. He can change his mind a thousand times, and even at the last second, but whatever he finally does, or doesn't do, it will have been b'shert, that is, meant to be. That is part of what it means to be God, and above time, and for man to be man, and bound by time.

Hence, today, as the world begins its final push for what they call the two-state solution, which is no solution at all, and broach the topic of dividing Jerusalem, God forbid, and even enjoy support from intellectually and emotionally confused Jewish groups, they are just the bad guys God has chosen to work His magic as we close in on the Final Redemption.

Hard to see how? That's what this week's parshah comes to make easier, for it showcases Yosef's change of fortune after a few parshios and many years of downward motion. Hated by his brothers, he was sold into slavery, only later to be falsely accused by his new Egyptian boss' wife for which he was thrown into jail to pay the price for remaining steadfast in his moral convictions. What a life! What Divine Providence!

In this week's parshah, we finally see why. This was the path that Yosef had to take towards redemption, and to become leader over Egypt. When he first dreamed of kingship, no one had seen that he would end up as a leader over Egypt; they didn't even accept that he would lead anyone at all, and they rejected him outright.

Perhaps that was an historical ambiguity that was resolved against them. Perhaps, had the brothers recognized Yosef for who he was, and who he was destined to become, he could have led them in Eretz Canaan, and avoided the Egyptian exile altogether. Perhaps by refusing the promise of his dreams, they imposed upon themselves a need to be exiled into Egypt, and all the hardship that transpired from that point onward.

Yosef, for his part, didn't handle the situation with his brothers as well as he ought to have, and required his travails for his own reasons. They sold him into slavery, but he would not have been sold had it not been part of his personal rectification and training as well. Perhaps if he had dealt with

his brothers in a more positive way, they would not have rejected him and his dreams, and they all would have stayed home in Canaan while building the Jewish nation.

In any case, all of the bad that happened to Yosef at the hands of others was just the result of God manipulating history to fulfill the master plan of Creation. People see themselves making choices and take for granted that they are in charge of their lives, but they fail to take into account how God seamlessly manipulates history to take advantage of their assumptions and attitudes, causing them to make decisions that need to be made for the sake of the bigger picture of history.

Of course the wine steward forgot about Yosef after he was released from jail and restored to his former position in the royal court. What purpose would it have served Yosef and history had he tried to get him out of jail as soon as he himself had been freed? In this case none, which is why God chose someone who would forget Yosef until he had no choice but to recall him.

To create that moment, Pharaoh was made to dream. And not just any dreams, but dreams that would defy interpretation by his own court interpreters so that he would demand someone else from outside the court. This not only forced the wine steward to tell the king about the Jewish slave with whom he shared a prison cell, but also to remind Pharaoh about the offense he had committed in the first place that sent him to jail. It was painful but poetic justice.

Likewise, the leaders of today, if they only took Jewish history seriously (if WE only took Jewish history seriously!), they would ask themselves, "How are the events of today leading up to an End-of-Days scenario, and the fulfillment of Jewish destiny?" If they only asked themselves that question, they might look at what is happening around them and forcing them to make the decisions that they are making. It would help them to see how God is manipulating the events of history, and using them as either a protagonist or, more than likely, an antagonist.

Such an approach to history once served one Roman leader very well, as the Talmud states:

He [the Emperor] sent against them Nero the Caesar. As he was coming he shot an arrow towards the east, and it fell in Jerusalem. He then shot one towards the west, and it again fell in Jerusalem. He shot towards all four points of the compass, and each time it fell in Jerusalem. He said to a certain boy: "Repeat to me [the last] verse of Torah you have learnt." He said: "And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel (Yechezkel 25:14)."

He said: "The Holy One, Blessed is He, desires to lay waste his House and to lay the blame on me."

So he ran away and became a convert, and Rebi Meir descended from him. (Gittin 56a)

I doubt, however, that President Obama, or Prime Minister Cameron, or the rest of today's world leaders will take note of any of this and wake-up to the role they are playing as part of the fulfillment of Jewish destiny, especially as the final keitz, Keitz HaYomim fast approaches. He certainly won't do so on the level of President Truman, who saw himself as helping the Jewish people to fulfill the words of prophecy by returning to their land at the end of history.

However, that does not mean that we should not take note, or take heart in the fact that no matter how bad the situation gets for the Jewish people and the Land of Israel, and how powerful our enemies may appear to be, it isn't, and they aren't. They dance to God's music, not their own, and soon enough, they will be forced to either facilitate Jewish destiny, or at least get out of its way.

This is the message of this week's parshah. This is the message of Jewish history. And, it is even the message of Chanukah.

Text

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