

GOD IS IN CONTROL

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

I am the Lord, your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be God to you. (Vayikra 25:38)

One of the reasons for the mitzvah of Shmittah, the seventh year of a seven-year cycle during which the land in Israel is left unworked, coming up this Rosh Hashanah b"H, is to remind us that God controls everything. It reminds us that even though we may put a lot of effort and resources into our survival, still, it is all from God, the effort, the resources, and the survival.

Even evil lacks a separate and independent existence, feeding off holiness to survive. If evil exists it does so in His world which is made up of Him, the Creator Himself. And even though evil can be incredibly destructive, still it can never go against the will of God and must, in the end, be a fulfillment of that very Divine will, no matter how counterintuitive it seems to us. For someone who does not believe in God, or at least in Divine Providence, life is simple. For such a person "good" is what it seems to be to man, and evil, likewise. Tragedy is exactly that, and therefore unfortunate and meaningless. In the world of the disbeliever history is random and things "just happen" for better or for worse.

For the person who believes in God and Divine Providence, however, life is more complicated. Such a person does not have the "luxury" of believing in "random" occurrences, nor can he just "sit back" and let history run its course. For the believer life is an intellectual and emotional balancing act between acting as if history is random while knowing that it is not.

What this means is that one must look at the events of history as if they can be mitigated as a function of human will while keeping in mind that nothing changes unless God sanctions it. Thus, sometimes the best of efforts to do good or evil fail, while the weakest of attempts to do either succeed. Ultimately, success in any respect, is totally a function of the will of God, as it says:

All is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of God. (Brochos 34b).

Where it really gets confusing is when bad things happen to good people and vice-versa. In fact very little makes people believe that God is not around or involved in history more than this issue. When the matter is multiplied by 6,000,000 it becomes intellectually and emotionally unmanageable for many who end up "jumping ship" if they were once religious, or never boarding it if they weren't.

There is another option, and it is called emunah, or faith. Avraham Avinu was fathered by the idol manufacturer of his time, Terach, which does not make sense. How can someone so evil produce someone so great? Why would God do that? These are good questions, but already being historical fact, we can simply accept them on faith.

Yosef's brothers sold him into slavery, a very disturbing event in the course of Jewish history. It is also a difficult one to sell while teaching our children the importance of getting along with each other and avoiding sibling rivalry. But, if such great people could commit such a catastrophic error, then how can we be expected to avoid making similar mistakes?

It's another good question, but the bottom line is: It happened, it's in the Torah, accept it. As "believing" Jews do we have much of a choice? Isn't that what emunah is all about, about accepting the incomprehensible parts of Jewish history on par with the comprehensible ones, especially if they are part of Tanach or the Talmud?

The problem is that at some point in time the narration came to an end. Tanach came to a close with the last prophet about 2300 years ago, as did the Talmud about 1500 years ago. This has forced us to deal with the events of history on whatever limited level we can, leaving us unsure about what is happening, what its impact will be on our lives, and how to deal with it today wisely for the future good.

This is rarely easy to do, especially in the heat of the moment. Emunas Hachamim—belief in the wise men, that is, our Torah leaders, is a mitzvah. We'd like to believe that being so, God for His part gives such leaders the wherewithal to make "good" decisions even if making them is beyond their personal abilities to do so.

But what happens if the people they are leading do not deserve to be well led? Or what happens when the leaders themselves dispute one another, and each has a very different approach to the same critical issue? Or what does one do when they themselves are unsure about the direction to take for the time being? Is there anything an individual can do when Heaven decides that historical clarity is not forthcoming?

This is one approach, and it is the one I have taken, at least with respect to the issue of Eretz Yisroel in our time.

Step One is to step outside the controversy and build an understanding of the issue from scratch. What does the Torah say about Eretz Yisroel in general? What does the Talmud write? What did the Rishonim say in their time about the matter, and what do the Acharonim say in ours? It took a little while longer, but eventually I even looked to see how Kabbalah weighs in on the issue.

My findings resulted in a couple of books, the first one called "If Only I Could Stay," which examines the attitude of many religious Jews today who reject the idea of aliyah in their time. After further research and some more years later, it resulted in another book called, "Talking About Eretz Yisroel,"

which focuses on the centrality of Eretz Yisroel throughout all of history.

It wasn't about convincing myself to make aliyah. After spending four years in yeshivah in the Holy Land, and then a few more after that while married, I had already come to the conclusion that the Jewish homeland was the best place to be Jewish. It was about trying to help others to feel the same way on their own. When I first lived in Eretz Yisroel, it was a matter of "to each his own." After the research aliyah, or at least wanting to make aliyah, was not only viable for all Jews, but even imperative.

The discussion turned a crucial corner when I "chanced upon" (read: Divine Providence) historical information that put the entire Eretz Yisroel issue into a different and more urgent perspective. The information was so critical and yet so unknown that I had to read it several times before I could accept what it was saying. It was like reading about the cure for a disease that was ravaging the population while all the doctors and immunologists continued to act as if it did not exist.

The "Leshem," Rabbi Shlomo Elyashiv, zt"l, died in 1926. He was called the "last Kabbalist" by the Chazon Ish himself, and he wrote many works dealing with all that happened until Creation based primarily on the Zohar and the writings of the Arizal. It is nothing short of remarkable how much information he was able to marshal and organize, and best of all, clearly present.

In one of his landmark works, "Drushei Olam HaTohu," literally "Discourses About the World of Null," he discusses the concept of Techiyas HaMeisim, the Resurrection of the Dead. Unlike reincarnation, in which the soul of a person is born into a new body during history as we now know it, Techiyas HaMeisim is when God rebuilds the old body from scratch before returning the soul that once gave it life.

When does Techiyas HaMeisim take place? The most obvious answer is in the World-to-Come, after 6000. We are currently in 5774. By that time all bodies will have dissolved in the ground and will need to be returned whole, albeit in a far more spiritual state than now, with their souls, to stand in judgment before God. After that, both body and soul, together, will be punished or rewarded accordingly, as the Talmud states (Sanhedrin 91a).

A less obvious answer is this::

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 time. However, righteous people who have died previously will resurrect immediately after the 40 years from the ingathering of the exiles. This is what it says in Midrash Ne'elam (Parashas Toldos 140a): There will be many resurrections, and the duration of time will be, according to Rebi Yehudah, from 40 years after the ingathering of the exiles, at which time the first resurrection will occur, and the resurrections will continue from then until the last resurrection, [a total of] 210 years. According

to Rebi Yitzchak, 214 years. (Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 4, Anaf 12, Siman 9)

The ingathering of the exiles? What does the ingathering of the exiles, or Kibbutz Golios in Hebrew, have to do with Techiyas HaMeisim? Kibbutz Golios takes place in history on this side of 6000, as part of the Messianic Era. Techiyas HaMeisim, assumedly belongs to history on the other side of 6000.

Or does it? Not according to the Leshem:

Purim and Yom HaKippurim will not be annulled at that time [in Techiyas HaMeisim, as opposed to the other holidays], since Purim is the revelation of the Yesod of Abba [which will govern history from 8000-9000] as it is known in Kevanos Purim [of the Arizal]. Therefore it alludes to the Eighth Millennium when [the sefirah of] Chochmah will be the primary influence. 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 is 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 Techiyas HaMeisim] 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)

In other words, explains the Leshem, contrary to popular belief Techiyas HaMeisim does not occur after 6000, but in advance of it, and he spends many pages explaining why this must be so. The Arizal, in Sha'ar HaGilgulim, seems to conclude likewise. And, adds the Leshem based upon the Zohar, it will last a long period of time, either 210 or 214 years, depending upon who is right, Rebi Yehudah or Rebi Yitzchak.

Now, 500 years ago this information might have been eye-opening, but not necessarily exciting. After all, 210 years could occur anytime between 500 years ago and 290 years later, and how much more so during earlier periods of time.

When I first saw this section of the Leshem, however, it was around 1998, or 5758, only 242 years in advance of 6000. I had already researched and dealt with the 150 year discrepancy between the Western date and the Jewish date, and was comfortable that the Jewish year was indeed accurate. Therefore, I understood from this, that the period of Techiyas HaMeisim at that time could begin in 32 years time . . . within my lifetime!

Just to clarify, this is not considered to be predicting the date of Moshiach's arrival, which contrary to popular opinion, is not forbidden to do, just "dangerous." It can only be done using certain methods, but there is always the risk of being wrong and misleading and disappointing people. All the Leshem is doing is presenting historical information from the Zohar, and I am just pointing out its implications.

One such implication is that, if Techiyas HaMeisim is destined to begin 40 years after Kibbutz Golios, then it would have to begin 250 years before 6000, in 1986 according to Rebi Yitzchak and in 1990 according to Rebi Yehudah. When I realized that little fact it was no longer in the future but in the past. If the Zohar was to be taken literally, which the Leshem seemed to do, either 1986 or 1990 marked the official beginning of Kibbutz Golios.

I could spend at least an entire page describing the impact this new information had on my life at the time, intellectually and emotionally. It was a game changer, life altering. And as we will see next week, b"H, it put a whole different light on the existence of the Jewish state at this time of history, the events that have occurred in recent times, and the importance of making aliyah, or at least, wanting to, in our times.

Text

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