

MIKETZ - PREPARING FOR THE END

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

At the end of two full years, Pharaoh had a dream . . . (Bereishis 41:1)

One of things that always amazes me about Torah is how small things can mean so much. For example, the Hebrew word mikeitz is but three letters—Mem-Kuf-Tzaddi—and yet it teaches us one of the most important lessons of life, if we give the word its due attention.

In the summer of 2001 while teaching at a girl's seminary in Jerusalem, I concluded the term with a series of classes about the current status of Jewish history, as I had in previous years. I told the girls, all of whom were set to return to the States and enter some college program, that as peaceful as life was in the States for them now, they could expect some major cataclysmic event to occur in the near future (though at the time I had no idea what it would be), that would change the course of history.

Had I made such a remark at the beginning of the term they would have balked and written me off as an extremist, as some kind of End-of-Days nut, and probably would have reported me to management. That's one of the reasons why I always waited until the end of the term to make my case, after proving myself as a reasonable individual, and after having logically made my point.

Thus it was hard, by that time, for any of my students to argue otherwise. Over the course of three days we had assembled a 6000-year timeline, plotted all kinds of relevant information on it, added some lesser known but equally important Kabbalistic details, and made the case for an End-of-Days scenario. I told that it would seem, based upon what we had carefully drawn on the large white board, that a keitz was coming up, and that something would have to happen to change the situation as it presently stood.

As usual they left somewhat unnerved. But also as usual they mostly forgot about what we had spoken about and returned back to life as normal, and headed for college and the future they had planned for themselves. That is, until a few months later, when 9/11 occurred.

"How did you know?" people asked me after the shock of what occurred began to lessen somewhat.

There answer is because I had learned, including from this week's parshah, that there are basically two levels of Divine Providence as history goes. One is what many today call "History on Auto-Pilot," but which others call the "Hidden Hand of God." The other is called Keitzin, or End-Times, either THE End-Time, as in the End-of-Days, or an End-Time, as in the end of the last two years of Yosef's

incarceration. Either way, it is a pre-designated time by which either redemption or an aspect of redemption must occur.

The difference between the two levels is quite distinct. It's like the difference between cooking for Shabbos on Wednesday, and cooking for Shabbos two hours before sunset on Friday afternoon. In the case of the former, since so much time remains before Shabbos begins, a chef can afford to be laid back, relaxed, and do everything by the book. You can probably even talk to him or her while he or she does the cooking and baking, since there is less possibility of error, and time to correct what goes wrong.

Cooking on Erev Shabbos, however, is a different story. It is a much more hectic process requiring greater focus since there is more possibility of error, and little or no time to fix it. Sometimes shortcuts even have to be taken, and cooking rules have to be bent to finish the work on time, and well enough for a Shabbos meal.

In-between keitzin, we seem to have significant control over our lives and their directions. We can make plans and carry them out. What we expect to occur naturally seems to occur, or to not occur, again, for natural reasons. In-between keitzin, there are few surprises in life.

But should a keitz come around, it is a very different story. Man may drift through time, but Heaven is single-minded about its goal for history. Heaven is always building towards redemption, even when we do not, and ultimately, the final one. And every once in a while history hits a deadline, a moment in time by which certain aspects of redemption to have been completed.

If history and mankind are on schedule, then life continues as normal. If history and mankind are behind the Divine schedule, then Divinely-ordained corrective measures have to be taken to bring Creation and history up to speed.

That's what made me think, back in early 2001, that something major was in the works that would alter the course of history. Based upon what I had learned and surmised, it seemed as if a keitz was fast approaching, perhaps even the final one, and that the world, and in particular the Jewish people, just did not seem ready for it.

Even many religious Jews over the last 100 years have become overly rooted in the Diaspora, and lack redemption consciousness. This has to change, it seemed to me, and to others who were on the same historical and philosophical page. It would have to change either through education, which did not seem forthcoming, or through historical incidents that would wake people up and make them focus on the larger goals of the Jewish people, such as the Final Redemption.

The point is this. In-between keitzin, we write the music, so-to-speak, to which history seems to dance. However, when a keitz approaches, then it, again so-to-speak, writes the music to which we must dance, meaning that our lives seem to now be at the mercy of its will, that is, the will of Heaven for that keitz.

Depending on the size of the keitz and its needs, we lose control of our lives. Plans often go astray, and whatever peace we may have enjoyed until then is usually interrupted, if not shattered altogether. In the Holocaust, Jews went from being lovers of life to desirers of death, when the keitz became too intense for many to handle.

Back to our parshah. Based upon the idea of a keitz, it's not that Pharaoh never dreamed until this week's parshah. Obviously he dreamed all the time, except that in the past, either his dreams never bothered him, or if they did, he found satisfactory interpretations for them amongst his myriad of priests and magicians.

But a keitz had arrived at the doorstep of Pharaoh's palace. This meant that Yosef, a young Jewish slave boy accused of adultery with his master's wife, had to be released from prison, proven innocent, and unprecedentedly and instantly catapulted from the depths of Egyptian society to its heights.

Therefore, Pharaoh was made to dream, and not just any dreams, but dreams that would force him to go in search of an accurate interpretation, one that could not be rendered by his palace staff. This way, the wine steward would be compelled to reveal the talents of Yosef HaTzaddik, against his better judgment, and put him on track for the greatness Yosef himself had dreamed about 12 years earlier.

Such is the power of a keitz. Even greater will be the power of the final one.

That's why things can change so fast in history, and often do. Overnight, and for reasons not foreseen by experts, the stock market can crash. Within a week, in ways that no one anticipated, countries can make decisions that affect the fate of millions, if not hundreds of millions of people, for either good or bad. Within a short month, the entire world can change in ways that most would have thought only occur in disaster movies. It already has many times before.

What can a person do to avoid being run over by a keitz, especially the final one? A great rabbi had this to say about the matter:

I heard in London from the holy Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman, quoting the Chofetz Chaim, that our Rabbis say that the war of Gog and Magog will be threefold. After the First World War, the Chofetz Chaim said that it was the first battle of Gog and Magog, and that in about 25 years time, a second world war would occur that would make the first one seem insignificant. And then, there will be a third battle . . . Rav Elchanan concluded that one must suffer the pangs of Moshiach. However, the wise man will quietly prepare himself during that time, and perhaps he will merit to see the comforting of Zion and Jerusalem. (Leiv Eliyahu, Shemos, p.172)

Thus, though there may be nothing one can do to stop a keitz from occurring, it doesn't hurt to be prepared for it. Indeed, it only seems to really hurt, as the story of Chanukah reveals, when we are not. For to be prepared for a keitz, as we learn from Mattisyahu and his small army of Maccabees, is

to be able to take advantage of an opportunity for victory, on our terms. Chanukah Samayach.

Text

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