

DO YOU ANTICIPATE THE REDEMPTION?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

THERE ARE TWO explanations given for why this week's parshah is "closed" (it begins in a Sefer Torah in the middle of a line as opposed to after nine spaces as is usually the case), as Rashi explains:

Why is this section [completely] closed? As soon as our father Ya'akov passed away the eyes and the hearts of the Jewish people were "closed," (i.e., it became "dark" for them) because of the misery of the slavery, for they (the Egyptians) began to subjugate them. Another explanation: That he (Ya'akov) wanted to reveal the End [of Days] to his sons, but it was "closed off" (concealed) from him. (Rashi, Bereishis47:28)

Hmm. Apparently talking about the End-of-Days was a sensitive topic even in Ya'akov Avinu's time. Therefore, before going any further, let's answer some of the more prevalent questions that arise when discussing this subject.

Is it permissible to speak about the "End-of-Days," namely, the "Days of Moshiach"?

The truth is, many, many sources do, including the Talmud (see Sanhedrin 97a-99a). Countless other books have been written solely on this subject over the generations by very respected rabbis. More recently the book, "When Moshiach Comes: Halachic and Aggadic Perspectives," was published (1994), an English version of the Hebrew work, "Otzros Acharis HaYamim," by Rabbi Yehudah Chayoun.

What then is forbidden regarding discussing the End-of-Days?

The Talmud states:

Rav Shmuel ben Nachmani said in the name of Rav Yonason: May the spirit of those who calculate the end expire. For they say, "Since the pre-determined time has arrived and he (Moshiach) has yet to come, he will never come!" (Sanhedrin97b)

Whoever forecasts the date of Moshiach's arrival has no place in the World-to-Come. (Maseches Derech Eretz 11)

Hence, we see that the Talmud is only concerned about making calculations regarding the precise

day for Moshiach's arrival, since errors in such calculations usually result in national disappointment, and perhaps, revelations of false messiahs. The Rambam mentions this in his introduction to "Chelek," the eleventh chapter of Sanhedrin, where he writes: "One should not assign a date and explain verses homiletically in order to pinpoint the date of Moshiach's arrival." Furthermore, the Talmud wrote:

When Rav Zeira happened upon scholars who were engaged [in calculating the date of the coming of Moshiach], he told them, "I beg you, do not postpone it . . . for it has been taught, 'Three things come when the mind is occupied otherwise: Moshiach, something that is lost, and a scorpion.'" (Sanhedrin 97a)

Additionally, there is also the concern that believing in a specific date will prevent a person from expecting Moshiach earlier than that date, a violation of the principle of "anticipating him any day." Failure to anticipate the possible arrival of Moshiach at any time, says the Rambam, can give such a Jew the halachic status of a heretic (Hilchos Melachim 11:1).

Yet, we see that great rabbis over the ages did precisely this, and were not chastised for doing so?

This is because the prohibition of calculating the arrival date of Moshiach has been interpreted differently by many rabbis, to name a few:

Ramban (1194-1270) : The prohibition of the Talmud only applied to earlier generations; now that we are on the eve of redemption, there is no prohibition (Sefer HaGeulah, Ma'amer 4).

Zohar (1380) : It is not God's will that the date of Moshiach's arrival be revealed to man, but when the date draws near, even children will be able to make the calculation (Bereishis 118a).

Abarbanel (1437-1508) : It is forbidden to make the calculation based upon astrology; however, it is permissible to calculate a date based upon Tanach (Maayeni HaYeshuah 1:2).

Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) : From here [what I have just written] you can calculate the time of the Final Redemption if, God forbid, we do not merit [to bring it earlier]. However, I have imposed an oath, in the name of the God of Israel, on the reader of this that he should not reveal it. (Biur HaGra, Safra D'Tzniusa, Chapter Five)

Malbim (1809-1879) : The situation is like that of a father and son traveling a long distance. As they start out, the son asks when they will arrive, and of course, the father does not answer. However, as they near the town, the son asks the same question, and this time the father readily answers that it is only a short while before they reach their destination. So too it is with us: now that the time is clearly approaching, we cannot help but notice and interpret the signs all around us that tell of the impending geulah . . . As the time of the keitz grows nearer, the doubts will become smaller, and at the end all doubts will be removed . . . As the time grows closer, the uncertainty recedes in the wake

of the increasingly "abounding wisdom" (Introduction to Daniel).

What importance, if any, is there to speak about redemption and the End- of-Days?

The Talmud states:

Rava said: When they bring a person for judgment, they will ask him, "Did you deal faithfully in business? Did you set aside fixed times for Torah study? Did you try to have children? **Did you anticipate the redemption?** . . ." (Shabbos 31a)

This means that one cannot ignore the concept of redemption even for the sake of other mitzvos, like the all-important mitzvah of learning Torah. On the contrary, the learning of Torah should only make one anticipate geulah that much more, the same way it should enhance one's love of Eretz Yisroel and yearning to live there. Furthermore, Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, zt"l, wrote in the name of Rav Elchanan Wasserman, zt"l, the following:

I heard in London from the holy Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman, quoting the Chofetz Chaim, that Chazal say the war of Gog and Magog will be threefold. After the First World War, the Chofetz Chaim said that this was the first battle of Gog and Magog, and in about twenty-five years (1942) there would be a second world war, which would make the first one seem insignificant, and then there would be a third battle . . . Rav Elchanan concluded that one must suffer the pangs of Moshiach, but the **wise man will quietly prepare himself during that time**. Perhaps [this will make him] worthy of seeing the comforting of Tzion and Yerushalayim. (Leiv Eliyahu, Shemos, page 172)

Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, zt"l, wrote the following regarding the topic of the End-of-Days:

The Sefer Mitzvos HaKatan wrote in his explanation of the positive mitzvah, "I am God, your God, Who took you out of Egypt," that it means one must know that He Who created Heaven and Earth alone controls [the world] above and below. To this he added, however, "This [mitzvah] is the basis for what the rabbis teach: At the time of a person's judgment after death they will ask him, 'Did you anticipate redemption?' (Shabbos 31a). Where is this mitzvah written? It actually comes from this [same mitzvah], for just as, 'I am God, your God, Who took you out of Egypt,' means that we are expected to believe that God redeemed us from Egypt, it also means, ' . . . I also want you to believe that I, God your God, will gather you in and redeem you in mercy a second time.' " According to what he (i.e., the Sefer Mitzvos HaKatan) said, belief in the future redemption is part of our faith in, "I am God your God," and is thus included in the first of the Ten Commandments. If we examine ourselves it seems as if we are very far from having faith in the future redemption. Occasionally we speak about God having made Heaven and Earth, and that He directs Creation. When it comes to the arrival of Moshiach and the resurrection of the dead, though, we are quiet, as if we are embarrassed to speak about them, as if we have given up [on such realities] altogether. The words of the Sefer Mitzvos HaKatan should arouse trembling in our hearts . . . anyone who is not involved with these matters is far from having any true faith . . . In truth, almost the majority of the Shemonah Esrei deals

with the future redemption . . . and just as we are lacking faith in this matter we are also distant from the essence of prayer. We lack connection to [the blessings regarding redemption], and all of our prayers are only lip service! (Ohr Yechezkel, Emunas HaGeulah, 1960; p. 287)

There are many other sources to this effect, all of which serve to strengthen the point. As well, there are the numerous stories of pre-World War II Torah giants, such as the Chofetz Chaim, and how they lived with the daily reality of an imminent redemption. The following sums up what is lacking from our generation, which ironically, lives so close to the Final Redemption:

If I could find more colleagues who felt the same . . . we would go out into the fields and demand with prayer and supplication [the arrival of Moshiach] and not return home until the Jewish people have received eternal salvation and redemption through the coming of Moshiach Ben Dovid. (Divrei Chaim of Sanz, Beis Shlomo)

In the words of the great Chofetz Chaim himself, it says:

Several times a day we request redemption, but requesting is not enough. We must DEMAND redemption, just as a worker demands his salary. For the halachah is that if he does not, his employer need not pay him that day. (Commentary on the Siddur, section 168)

Finally, the Vilna Gaon put the concept of redemption in these terms, as told by his students:

The purpose of redemption is the true redemption and sanctification of God's Name. According to the words of our prophets and the explanation of our teacher, the goal of our work is the war against Armelius, carried out through the ingathering of the exiles and settling of the Land for the sake of the true redemption and sanctification of God's Name . . . We don't need to reach the appointed time [of redemption], but rather, the [time of Final Redemption] will come to us, after "Your servants have cherished her stones and favor her dust" (Tehillim 102:14-15) . . . **The arrival of the Redeemer depends upon the building of Zion.** (Kol HaTor, Chapter 4:1-3)

So, it is safe to say that in our generation it is not only permissible to speak about the End-of-Days, it is a mitzvah to do so. Not only will we be able to answer the question, "Did you anticipate the redemption" affirmatively, but we might even be able to mitigate the extent of the final War of Gog and Magog.

Text

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