

INGATHERING OF THE EXILES

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Then, God, your God, will bring back your exiles, and He will have mercy upon you . . . (Devarim 30:3)

It's amazing how the mind makes associations. For me, Parashas Ki Savo represents a major turning point in the year, a watershed. Once it is over, I feel like I'm on my final approach to Rosh Hashanah and Divine judgment. The fact that it is followed by such short parshios, even shorter during a leap year when Nitzavim and Vayailech are uncoupled, also brings me a sense of relief. It's as if I can "cruise" a bit until the cycle of weekly Torah readings ends on Simchas Torah, b"H.

Perhaps. Nevertheless, the shortness of these parshios should not fool a person into thinking that the Torah has said all it really wants to say, and is just wrapping up. Some heavy weight issues surface in these concluding weekly readings, including the idea of "Kibbutz Golios," the "Ingathering of the Exiles."

Simply, Kibbutz Golios means the return of all remaining Diaspora Jewry to Eretz Yisroel. That is where we began after leaving the desert, and that is where we will end up at the end of history. Living outside of the Land at that time will no longer be an option, though some will leave kicking and screaming:

The day on which the Jewish people's exiles will be gathered is so monumental and [this ingathering] will be such a difficult [procedure], that it is as though God Himself must literally take each individual Jew with His very hands, [taking him] out of his place [in exile]. (Rashi, Devarim 30:3)

In fact, the Talmud seems to think that the four-fifths crisis will repeat itself at the End-of-Days. Four-fifths of the Jewish people died in the Plague of Darkness because they didn't want to leave Egypt. The Talmud says that something similar will occur to masses of Jews when it comes time to leave exile for good (Sanhedrin 111a). The option will not be to go or stay. It will be to go or die. At least, that is what the Talmud says.

Will we recognize Kibbutz Golios once it begins? Yes and no, or rather, no and yes. Apparently there are two phases of the ingathering of the exiles. The first one occurs prior to the arrival of Moshiach, over time, and is less noticeable. The second one will be after Moshiach's arrival, will occur at once, and will be apparent to all, as the following indicates:

It is quite well known that God works measure-for-measure. Those who lived in the Diaspora and made efforts and sacrifices to elevate themselves by moving to the Holy Land merited purity of soul. They were not so concerned about their finances and health. They traveled over vast lands and crossed seas, not paying attention to the possibilities of drowning, being robbed along the way, or being taken captive by some strange foreign ruler. Being that they placed priority of their spirit over materialism and physicality, they merit, measure-for-measure, to be elevated to this lofty spiritual plane. On the other hand, you who also had opportunities to go up to Israel, but remained hesitant and reluctant, enamored instead with your materialistic status, making materialism a higher priority than spiritual growth, therefore, measure-for-measure, remain physical . . . However, for those who valued their soul most, they will be transformed into supernal beings and will be led into the earthly Garden of Eden. (Tuv HaAretz: Praise Of Those Who Dwell In Israel At The Time Of Moshiach)

According to the Vilna Gaon, the time to start the reversal of exile was around 5500, or 1740 CE. To do this he sent his students from Vilna to Eretz Yisroel to begin the process of rebuilding the Jewish settlement. Between that time and today, waves of aliyah have occurred to the point that the Jewish population in Eretz Yisroel has either surpassed the total number of Diaspora Jews, or is about to.

Some see this as being Messianic. True, the country is still being run by secular Jews, and religious Jews make up the minority of the population. This is nothing new according to Kabbalah however, or to Jewish history for that matter. Moshiach's own lineage had a similar beginning, starting with a descendant of Lot and his own daughter. Even the most crooked path to redemption can be "straightened" with the help of a little Kabbalah.

Others, on the other hand, are still waiting for Kibbutz Golios to begin. The fact that the Jews not only received their land back with the permission of the nations of the world, but that they have built it up despite existential wars, doesn't impress them that much. The subtlety with which God is taking care of Kibbutz Golios "Phase One" makes them feel, to their relief, that there is no rush to make aliyah.

How do we know that all of the aliyah and development of the country is part of Kibbutz Golios? Aside from that fact that both have occurred so miraculously, we have the following:

Righteous people who have died previously will resurrect immediately after the 40 years from Kibbutz Golios. 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 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. (Leshem Shevo vAchlamah, Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 4, Anaf 12, Siman 9-10)

This says that Kibbutz Golios will begin 40 years in advance of Techiyas HaMeisim, or the Resurrection of the Dead. This also notes that Techiyas HaMeisim itself will only last either 210 or 214 years, and that it will occur on this side of history. Though many view the resurrection of the dead to

be a World-to-Come kind of event, since Kibbutz Golios definitely belongs to our period of history, Techiyas HaMeisim must as well. (A few pages later, the Leshem says this straight out.)

Combined, the two periods total either 250 or 254 years, 210 or 214 years of Techiyas HaMeisim and 40 years of Kibbutz Golios. Since history as we know it is destined to last only 6,000 years (Sanhedrin 97a), and we are now approaching 5777, there are only 223 years left until the end. Two hundred and ten to 214 years of this belong to the period of Techiyas HaMeisim.

If true, then there are only 9 or 13 years left until the period of the Resurrection of the Dead, a post-redemption era of history. To the point, the 9 or 13 years would therefore belong to the period of Kibbutz Golios which, being 40 years prior to Techiyas HaMeisim, would have had to begun either 27 or 31 years earlier than today. According to this, Kibbutz Golios would have begun as earlier as 5746 (1986) and as late as 5750 (1990).

Can anyone really confirm the accuracy of these dates and their meaning? It would take a prophet to do that. If Rebi Shimon bar Yochai, who was not a prophet, was alive today, we could at least ask him if this is what he meant when he left this information behind for the final generation. Even the Leshem, Rabbi Shlomo Elyashiv, who relied upon it, died in 1926, and is no longer here to explain to us why he based himself upon this statement from the Zohar.

On the other hand, if we look at the events of the last hundred years or so from this perspective, a lot is explained. We can see why Jews have been gravitating towards Eretz Yisroel for the last couple of hundred years. We can better appreciate, from a Divine Providence point of view, why European Jewry had to come to an end, and how this led to the regaining of a Jewish homeland.

It would certainly explain, from a Divine Providence point of view, why the UN voted in favor of the creation of a Jewish state, though they could have so easily done just the opposite. We can certainly marvel at how Roosevelt chose Truman as a running mate, and after dying in office leaving Harry S. as the American President at such a crucial time in Jewish history. Only Truman would have, at that time, stood up to his own State Department to push the UN to vote in favor of an official Jewish homeland.

It is certainly clearer, from this vantage point, why in spite of wars and against great odds the Jewish state has not only survived, but thrived. Those religious Jews who oppose the existence of a Jewish state at this time would like to call it the work of the Sitra Achra. The miracles however bear the seal of God Himself. Are they so sure of themselves as to ascribe the gifts of God to Satan instead?

Within this framework it is more obvious why Russia suddenly imploded around 1986, and why Jewish prominence in the United States began to wain from 1990 onward. It explains how an Obama could make it to power and change the rules of engagement with Israel and the Arab world. This viewpoint could even be used to explain why life in the Diaspora is becoming more chaotic by the week, and more dangerous for the Jew as a result.

This is, as they say, only the tip of the Kibbutz Golios iceberg. For the moment, it is important to consider how what was once only a longed-for prophecy may very well be a fulfilled one in our time. In OUR time. If so, then it is important to stop looking at the events of current history as random occurrences and to begin looking at them as Divine messages to the Jewish people about the direction of history. Surviving them depends upon it.

May 5777 be the year of the Final Redemption of the Jewish people, and the return of all Jewish exiles to Eretz Yisroel in a safe and peaceful manner. This includes those living in the Diaspora, and even some of those physically living in Eretz Yisroel, but not spiritually. Above all, may it be the year in which the Temple returns to its earthly abode, so that the Shechinah can return to it and dwell among the Jewish people as is fitting and destined. Shannah Tovah.