

THE END OF THE END?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Gather yourselves and I will tell you what will happen to you at the end of days. (Bereishis 49:2)

As the Torah reports, it had been Ya'akov Avinu's intention to reveal to his sons what was destined to happen to the Jewish people at the End-of-Days. As the Talmud explains, Ya'akov Avinu lost that prophecy, and "Acharis HaYomim" remains a mystery, other than scant details found in the Prophets.

How different history would have been had Ya'akov Avinu been able to divulge to his sons that day what to expect at the end of history. Not that we know for sure that THEY would have told THEIR children, or that such information would have maintained its integrity over time. Furthermore, who says that we would have understood what it meant in advance? So many prophecies tend to make sense only after they have been fulfilled.

The Talmud elsewhere states that we are under oath not to reveal the date of the end of history (Kesuvos 111a). Then again, many hold that the oaths mentioned there are more analogy than actual. They are probably an extension of the Talmud's concern about the impact of a late date for redemption on the psyche of an earlier generation (Sanhedrin 97b). Who wouldn't be despondent after finding out that Moshiach is many more years away than one has years to live?

That was then. "Today," which has included the last couple of hundred years, is ripe for redemption. According to the Vilna Gaon, the "Final Generation" actually began in his time, in the late 1700s. We're already holding in the year 2017. I suppose that could make us the "final generation" of the Final Generation.

What would Ya'akov Avinu have said to his sons, the 12 Tribes, anyhow, had he not lost the prophecy? Know that when a billionaire named Donald Trump wins the US Presidency and outgoing President Barak Obama cajoles the UN to tighten the screws on Israel, Moshiach is just footsteps away? What would they have answered?

"Right. Who's Donald Trump and Barak Obama, and what is a UN?"

Perhaps. Regardless, one has to wonder, contemplating the bigger picture of Jewish history, if NOW is what Ya'akov Avinu wanted to reveal THEN. We are certainly at very "interesting" crossroads today, clearly capable of leading to the kind of scenarios spoken about by prophets long ago, and of which every generation has hoped to avoid.

As of this moment, the situation may not appear serious. That is only because we do not know what

is truly going on behind the scenes, and more importantly, in Heaven. Furthermore, people tend not to project too far into the future when it comes to historical events, to imagine where they might go.

As the Talmud says, "Who is a wise person? One who sees what is being born." (Tamid 32a). So, let's project a bit now.

Everyone probably remembers "Operation Desert Storm." That was when, in 1990, a US-backed coalition attacked Iraq in order to restore Kuwaiti government to power. Saddam Hussein had ordered his army into Kuwait and took it over, forcing an international response that eventually led to his defeat, and ultimately to his death. He had taken land that the international "community" agreed was not his to take, and Hussein paid for it dearly.

The reason why the US had to lead the attack against Iraq, and not the UN, was because it was in the American's best interest to expedite matters. Also, the UN is comprised of many Arab or Muslim-sympathizing nations, and they have a problem going to war against an Arab "brother," no matter how annoying he is. This may be coming back to "bite" us.

What will the US say once it is agreed by the international community that Israel is "occupying" land that they say belongs to the Palestinians? What will happen if the world decides to acknowledge the existence of a Palestinian state whether Israel does or not? This time the Arabs and Muslim sympathizers are not facing off against a Muslim brother, but against their "Zionist enemy," with the blessing of many Western nations, including Great Britain.

President Trump may stick to his guns regarding his support of Israel, but against the rest of the world? Against his staunchest allies? Even if yes, what about Congress? Many Republicans can't wait to see Trump go, and many others will have a tough time justifying becoming an international outlaw because of tiny little Israel. And, when terrorism increases against American targets because of Israeli support, what will Americans then say?

Of course, it all has to do with God. He decides the direction of history. No one, no matter how politically powerful or wealthy can make anything happen that God does not sanction. In the end, the question we're really dealing with is, in which direction is Hashgochah Pratis working?

God loves the Jewish people more than we can imagine, and has done amazing things for us. But, He has also allowed bad people to do bad things to the Jewish people. If we don't heed His warnings and get on His "page," then Jewish enemies get ideas. They plan against us. And, when God sanctions it, they carry out those evil plans.

There are prophecies to this effect. We're not "flying" completely blind here. Major prophets made major prophecies about the End-of-Days. It doesn't matter that we cannot see clearly what they mean or to whom or when they apply. All that matters is that history can be projected in such a way as to possibly be their fulfillment. How many people see that they are going to be in a car accident more than seconds before it happens, even though it might have been in motion minutes, maybe

hours before?

Last week two important rabbis died here in Israel. One died suddenly from a heart attack in his 70s, and one died at the age of 81 after not being well for a while. I knew of both, but the younger one I knew personally. I'm still in shock, because he was someone I assumed would live for the next 20 years at least. He certainly seemed to deserve so, given his level of righteousness.

Another great Torah leader is 103, and ailing tremendously. He was just sent home from the hospital after some improvement in his situation, but he is very frail. He should live until 120, but whenever Hashem takes him, it will leave a gaping hole in the Jewish people.

The world's population is almost eight billion people today. But who keeps the world's peace? The few righteous people whose spiritual greatness is enough to counterbalance the anger of God against mankind. There is plenty of reason for God to be more than just a little upset at mankind these days, and the Jewish people in particular. We need those righteous people to protect us.

When they go, it is never good news for the world. It represents a breach in the invisible spiritual wall that protects us from harm. It allows the forces of evil to penetrate the realm of holiness and to do its worst. We know, as a people, just how bad that can be. God should have mercy on us! We certainly know, as a people, what many WANT to do to us. Some of them live right across the highway from me, and across the road from others.

I admit that all of this is only a projection. I don't know that any of this will come true, and I certainly pray that it doesn't. Like the next person, I want the status quo to only improve, not worsen. As any other Jew, I want the Final Redemption to come peacefully, not through war and suffering.

If only we knew what Ya'akov Avinu wanted to reveal to his sons. If only some of his prophecy made it down to them, and then to us. Then we would be able to recognize with more certainty the true nature of the events of our time. We'd be able to tell if they are supposed to be life-altering, or just life-disrupting. We would know what to do, and how.

Would we? Really? The funny thing about knowing the future is that it doesn't usually become recognizable until it has become the past. After it has already occurred and become what it has become, people can then say, "Oh, that was THAT." While still part of the future, it always seems like it is going to be something else, no matter how much it has the potential to be the fulfillment of prophecy.

Knowing the future does not help people to do the prudent thing as much as they think it can. For that, you need a voice to come down from Heaven at the correct moment and say, "This is going to be THAT, so you better deal with it now in a safe and appropriate manner." Short of that, even prophecy leaves people guessing until the future becomes the past.

In fact, prophecy can actually make the situation more dangerous. A prophecy usually describes a scenario at a stage when it is already too late to do anything about it. The world can be transitioning

to such a stage and people will not recognize it until it is too late to avoid the disaster. Relying on the prophecy, people can think they are safe when in fact, events are already in motion to fulfill their worst nightmare.

Then, what's left? The Talmud answers that question too, but in a different location. It says that a wise person is BETTER than a prophet (Bava Basra 12a). A prophet only has his prophecy, which is limited to what God reveals to him. A wise person has the prophecies as well as his genius to interpret those prophecies and project into the future. He has the ability to notice and recognize signs that can lead to the fulfillment of prophecy, and respond accordingly.

Maybe this is one of the reasons why, in the end, Ya'akov Avinu was denied the opportunity to "spill the beans" about the End-of-Days. Later prophets would leave enough clues. It would remain for the wise people, not the prophets, to correctly decipher them and determine the appropriate, God-desired course of action to avoid national, and even international catastrophe.