

THE SECRET TO OUR SURVIVAL

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

On Tisha B'Av I had the honor of presenting a lecture on the fulfillment of the Torah's prophecy throughout history. This week's Parsha was the source of many of those prophecies that have, unfortunately, come true. I say unfortunately because this week's Parsha contains the second Tochacha - Admonitions that states the terrible consequences that would befall the Jewish people if they did not adhere to the Mitzvos of Hashem. These consequences fall into three distinct categories: 1. National chaos and disintegration, prior to exile 2. Exile from the land of Israel and dispersion among the other nations. 3. Continued persecution and alienation while in exile. Since the time of the destruction of the second Bais Hamikdash, we have experienced all of these consequences in the exact manner that they are described in the Torah.

The norm of prophecies is to predict general trends within society, the economy, or within nature, which have good chances at coming true in the near future. (E.g. inflation, revolution, earthquakes, etc.) If they don't come true, our natural skepticism is confirmed. If they do come true, most of us write them off as "good guesses", or a good statistical analysis of probabilities and trends. Seldom, if ever, do we attribute to these predictions the element of the divine or the prophetic.

The Torah, on the other hand, prophesied events that were to take place hundreds and thousands of years into the future, and predicted events that were totally illogical and improbable. Therefore, when those prophecies did come true they confirmed the presence of a G-d who protects and punishes His chosen people within the ongoing events of creation and nations.

The Ramban on the Admonitions in Vayikra (26:16) explained that the Tochacha in Vayikra describes events that took place after the destruction of the 1st Bais Hamikdash. The events prophesied in this week's Admonitions describe events that took place, and continue to take place, after the destruction of the 2nd Bais Hamikdash.

Pasukim 28:49 - 50 in Ki Savo say, "G-d will bring upon you a nation... from the end of the earth, swooping down like an eagle... whose language you do not understand, a sadistic nation, that has no respect for the old and no mercy for the young".

The nation described in these verses is Rome, who captured Eretz Yisroel and destroyed the 2nd Bais Hamikdash in 3829 - 69 c.e. Considering that the Torah was given to the Bnai Yisroel 1,381 years before the destruction of the 2nd Bais Hamikdash, it is amazing that the Torah predicted an event that was totally illogical and improbable, with such detail. More so, those who claim that men wrote

the Torah, not G-d, must admit that including futuristic events that are improbable, illogical, and unpredictable exposes the Torah to eventual challenge, and almost certain disproof. Therefore, human authors would have avoided including any information that could eventually undermine the divine premise of their text. Allow me to explain.

a. "G-d will bring upon you a nation... from the end of the earth..." The logical prediction would be that a neighboring nation such as Ammon or Moab might one-day attack Israel in hope of expanding their territories. The notion of a single nation desiring world domination for reasons of ideology, not safety, was unheard of in the times of Moshe. That a nation "from the end of the earth" would one day dominate Eretz Yisroel was unprecedented and therefore illogical to predict; yet, the Torah prophesied it as a fact.

b. "Whose language you do not understand" During the first exile by the Babylonians, we were dominated by a Middle Eastern nation whose history and language paralleled our own. We both lived on the same continent, experiencing many of the same geographical and environmental influences. Both our languages and our social orientation were similar, and our subjugation fit into the general socio-historical pattern of that time. The possibility of a nation "whose language you do not understand" dominating Israel was too far-fetched and improbable to be predictable. Yet, the Torah specifies this unlikely fact in the prophecy!

c. "Swooping down like an eagle..." This statement by the Torah is the most curious of all. Of all the descriptions for the Torah to use, why does it describe this nation as an "eagle"? Josephus, in Jewish Wars 3:6 described the Roman legions as they entered into Israel. " And then came the banners emblazoned with the eagle standing at the head of each Legion. And since the eagle is the king of all birds, and the most daring among them, they see in it the Roman Empire." The Torah selected a specific description of the nation from afar who would occupy Eretz Yisroel and exile her people. The fact that over 1,000 years later this would prove to be the very symbol of that nation is nothing less than prophetic!

The history of our survival is an ongoing miraculous anomaly that defies any logical explanation. Therefore, we open our minds and hearts through davening, learning, and the manner in which we live to accept the obvious presence of a G-d who consistently loves and protects us.

Preparing for Selichos

The moment we hear the Chazan sing the hauntingly beautiful melodies of the Yomim Noraim, a hushed sense of expectation descends over the congregation. The Day of Judgment is almost here. Am I ready? Am I prepared? If not, it is definitely time to begin. This is the intended reaction to the Selichos which we will begin September 13, at 12:30 a.m.

Chazal established two basic rules for Selichos. 1. Always start on a Sunday 2. We must say Selichos for a minimum of 4 days prior to Rosh Hashana.

We start on Sunday to give ourselves the added advantage of starting our appeal while still cloaked in the sanctity of Shabbos. We start at midnight so as to grab every possible moment of preparation for the Day of Judgment. We say Selichos for a minimum of 4 days to imitate the 4 day process of preparation that a Korban - sacrifice had to undergo before it could be offered on the Mizbeach.

The Selichos themselves capture the hopes and tears of generations as they beseeched Hashem for continued protection and benevolence. Highlighting the entire service is the repetition of the 13 names of G-d as He manifests His love, compassion, and mercy for His people and universe.

The names by which we refer to Hashem (the Name) describe how we wish G-d to relate to us at a given moment. Taught to Moshe in the aftermath of the Golden Calf, this 13 name formula evokes G-d's mercy.

Rosh Hashanah means going to court, which should foster in us an overwhelming sense of vulnerability. This feeling should humble us into recognizing how much we need G-d's mercy and forgiveness. Saturday night, through the words of the Selichos, we will be able to express that sense of humility and vulnerability.

Good Shabbos.

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