

THE ROADMAP OF HISTORY

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R' Zvi Hirsch Kalischer z"l (Germany; 1795-1874; a leading advocate for the resettlement of Eretz Yisrael before the advent of Zionism) writes: This parashah, Ha'azinu, includes allusions to every major encounter between the Jewish People and the nations of the world, from the beginning of history to the end of history. It teaches that Hashem has never punished the Jewish People unjustly. It also teaches that the gentiles are not to blame that Hashem did not draw them close, as He did to the Jewish People. Indeed, at the end of days, those nations that choose to be close to the Jewish People will be filled with knowledge of Hashem, as we read (Yeshayah 56:6-7), "And the gentiles who join Hashem to serve Him and to love the Name of Hashem to become His servants . . . I shall bring them to My holy mountain, and I shall gladden them in My house of prayer, their olah-offerings and their zevach-offerings will find favor on My Altar, for My House shall be a house of prayer for all the peoples." But, of the wicked, who pain the Jewish People, it says (Yeshayah 66:54), "They shall go out and see the corpses of those who rebel against Me, . . . and they shall be a disgrace for all flesh." R' Kalischer continues: If all nations can come close to Hashem, what is the meaning of the verses spoken at the Giving of the Torah (Shmot 19:5-6), "You shall be to Me the most beloved treasure of all peoples, for the entire world is Mine. You shall be to Me a kingdom of kohanim and a holy nation"? It means: The whole world is Mine, says Hashem, and it is fitting that I love anyone who follows Me. But, just as the Jewish People have kohanim to instruct them in the ways of Hashem, and those kohanim have a higher degree of holiness, so will be the relationship of the Jewish People to the nations. Indeed, all faith in G-d among the nations has its source in the teachings of the Jewish prophets. (Sefer Ha'brit)

"Yeshurun [i.e., Yisrael] became fat and kicked." (32:15)

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) writes: We have a tradition that there will be a spiritual revolt in Eretz Yisrael and among the Jewish People in the very era in which the national life of our People reawakens. The reason is that the material tranquility that part of our nation will experience will lead it to believe that it already has attained its ultimate goal, thus causing the soul to become smaller, so-to-speak. Yearning for lofty and holy ideals will cease, and, as a natural consequence, the spirit will sink. Eventually, a storm will come and cause a revolution, and then it will be apparent that Yisrael's strength lies in the Eternal Holy One, in the light of His Torah, and in the desire for spiritual light. (Orot p.84)

"He will say, 'I shall hide My face from them and see what their end will be--for they are a generation of reversals, children in whom there is no confidence. They provoked Me with a non-god, angered Me with their [things that were] nothing; so I shall provoke them with a non-people, with a nation that is no nation I shall anger them'." (32:20-21)

R' Avraham Saba z"l (1440-1508; Spain and Portugal) writes: Hashem says in these verses, "I want to hide My face from them as if I don't see what's going on because they act like children who are inconsistent. I wish, so-to-speak, to see how far they will go--'what their end will be'--for they are a 'generation of reversals,' constantly changing their deeds. They are children in whom there is no confidence [i.e., no truth], for they don't maintain one position for very long. Maybe they will yet regret their deeds. Maybe, just as they abandoned Me for other gods, they will abandon those other gods and return to Me."

But, G-d continues, they didn't do that. "They provoked Me with a non-god, angered Me with their [things that were] nothing; so I shall provoke them with a non-people, with a nation that is no nation I shall anger them." Hashem responds measure-for-measure. This, writes R' Saba, is a recurring theme in our parashah. For example, Hashem gives us wealth so that we may study Torah in comfort, but, instead, we allow the wealth to cause us to rebel and forget G-d, as we read (verse 15), "Yeshurun became fat and kicked. You became fat, you became thick, you became corpulent--and it deserted Elokah its Maker, and was contemptuous of the Rock of its salvation." Therefore, we read (verses 23-24), "I shall accumulate evils against them, My arrows shall I use up against them: bloating of famine . . ." The parashah continues (verse 29), "Were they wise they would comprehend this, they would discern it from their end." We possess enough wisdom to discern that our troubles follow from our sins. (Tzror Ha'mor)

Sukkot

"On that day [Hoshana Rabbah] they circled the mizbei'ach / altar seven times. Rabbi Acha said: 'As a remembrance of Yericho'." (Talmud Yerushalmi: Sukkah 4:3)

When Bnei Yisrael entered Eretz Yisrael, the first city they conquered was Yericho. They did this by circling Yericho once each day for six days, then seven times on the seventh day, whereupon the city's walls collapsed (see Yehoshua ch.6). Paralleling this, when the Bet Hamikdash stood, a procession circled the mizbei'ach one time on each of the first days of Sukkot and seven times on Hoshana Rabbah. In turn, we recall that practice on the seven days of Sukkot by circling the bimah in shul a similar number of times while reciting Hoshanot.

But, what is the connection between the conquest of Yericho, which took place in Nissan, and Hoshanot on Sukkot?

Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z"l (Spain 1255-1340) explains: On Sukkot, we sacrifice a total of 70 oxen--13 the first day, 12 the second day, etc. The 70 oxen parallel the 70 nations of the world, and the decreasing number offered each day alludes to the eventual disappearance of those nations. (Some explain that the "disappearance" of the nations refers to mankind's eventual unification under the one, true G-d, at which time there will no longer be separate nations.) A procession marching in a circle likewise alludes to the disappearance of the nations, as is evident from the fact that that is how Yericho--the first place in Eretz Yisrael conquered by Bnei Yisrael--fell.

R' Shmuel Eliezer Eidels z"l (Maharsha; Poland; 1555-1631) writes: The purpose of Hoshanot is to seek Hashem's protection from our enemies. (The word "Hoshana" means "Please rescue [us].") That was the very same thing that Bnei Yisrael sought when they circled Yericho.

R' David ibn Zimra z"l (Radvaz; Eretz Yisrael and Egypt; 1479-1573) notes that there also is a custom to circle the deceased seven times before burial. He writes that these customs share a kabbalistic source that relates to chasing away forces of impurity.

Some explain the parallel between Yericho and Hoshanot as relating to the fact that the War of Gog and Magog will be fought on Sukkot and will culminate on Hoshana Rabbah. [That is why two of the Haftarot that we read on Sukkot relate to that war.] We allude in our prayers to Yericho, the first of our battles in Eretz Yisrael, as a surrogate for the final battle. Some say that that battle will take place in the plains surrounding Yericho. (Quoted in Otzar Mefarshei Hoshanot pp. 28-31)

Why is there no berachah on building the sukkah? Because it is not a mitzvah which one must do with his own hands; indeed, one could even have a non-Jew build a sukkah for him. (Tractate Menachot 42a)

Rashi explains: If there were a blessing, it would have to be (consistent with the usual formula), "Who sanctified us with His mitzvot and commanded us to build a sukkah." However, that statement would not be true; Hashem did not command us to build a sukkah, as is evident from the fact that a sukkah built by a non-Jew is also kosher. (Rashi: Commentary to Menachot 42a)

Some say that the reason there no berachah on building the sukkah is that we only recite a blessing

on a complete mitzvah. Building a sukkah is, at best, the beginning of a mitzvah. (Bet Yosef, Orach Chaim ch. 641)

Nevertheless, observes R' Shaul Eliezer Yedidyah Taub z"l (1887-1947; the "Moditzer Rebbe"), there is an allusion to a berachah in the sukkah itself, as follows:

Although halachah requires a sukkah to have only two full walls and a partial third wall, a "complete" sukkah is composed of four walls ("d'fanot"), with sechach on top. The gematria of the word "dofen" (singular for wall), multiplied by four (for the four walls), plus the gematria of the word sechach equals 660, which is also the gematria of the words, "Baruch Attah Hashem." (Imrei Shaul)

The halachah states that one is exempt from sitting in the sukkah if doing so will cause him to suffer. Why? We do not find that one is exempt from other mitzvot (for example, eating matzah) merely because observing the mitzvah may be unpleasant!

R' Menachem Mendel Morgenstern z"l (the "Kotzker Rebbe"; died 1859) explains: The idea of the sukkah is that one negates his independent existence and places himself completely in G-d's hands. However, if one suffers from sitting in the sukkah, this is an indication that he has not succeeded in nullifying his independent existence. What, then, does he accomplish by remaining in the sukkah?! (Emmet Ve'emunah No. 10)