

Behar 5778

BS"D Parashat Behar 5778 & Iran

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THE RABBIS KNEW IT ALL ALONG — IRAN

The deluge, which destroyed mankind at the time of Noach, indelibly engraved the fear in human consciousness that an event of commensurate proportions could again occur. There are those who propose that another world-wide catastrophe "could" occur and others who state that it will definitely strike the world, the only question is when?

Every generation produced its seers who predicted the day, and even the moment, when HaShem's wrath would again erupt in all its consuming fury to take down the helpless species called Man. And although their predictions have been time and again inaccurate, they go on predicting the day when life will cease to exist.

The pursuit of predicting future devastating events has an opposite parallel – the pursuit of predicting when HaShem will send the Mashiach to save His people Israel and the world. And, these efforts too have been disappointed, time and again, when the date arrived, and we found ourselves in an even more precarious situation.

In truth, each camp is frustrated in its efforts to arrive first, because they err in their perception and evaluation of reality.

Annihilation & Salvation

The future salvation or annihilation of billions of people is inexorably bound together with events. At the time when HaShem will send down His fury on the world's wicked, that will be the time when the righteous will find salvation.

This fundamental principle is articulated in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 98b) when discussing the generation of the Mashiach's appearance. The great Amora, Ula, declares "yay'tay ve'lo ach'me'nay" ("let him come but I don't want to see him," because of the great human suffering which will abound at the time). His fellow Amora, Rav Yosef, declares that he wishes to be present at the time and is even willing to suffer so much as to "sit in the shadow of his donkey's dung".

Two approaches. Two attitudes. But both agree that Armageddon and the Mashiach will share center stage simultaneously.

How will it play out? Who will be the major players?

Rashi, on the first verse in the Torah, quotes the Tanna Rabbi Yitzchak in the Midrash Tanchuma, who poses the question: The Torah is the book of mitzvot (commandments) of the Jewish nation, and as such should it not begin with the first mitzva which HaShem commanded us to calculate and declare the arrival of new months and years – not the story of creation?

Rabbi Yitzchak explains that HaShem began the Torah with the act of creation, so that the nations of the world who would, in the future, accuse the Jewish people of "stealing" Eretz Yisrael, should know that HaShem is the creator of all that exists. He has the absolute right to grant Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish nation to the exclusion of any other nation.

Rashi's choice to begin his commentary with this quote from Rav Yitzchak leaves us suspended between heaven and earth.

Rabbi Yitzchak is informing us that the nations will accuse us of imperialistic motives associated with evil regimes; and we will answer them with Torah based principles. Here Rabbi Yitzchak stops. How will it play out? Will the nations be convinced by our presentations or will they cast our claims aside and mete out their idea of justice through war or other sanctions? Rabbi Yitzchak and Rashi, what comes next?

Yalkut Shimoni at the end of the Book of Yeshayahu (#499) quotes a Tanna who states that in future time Paras (Persia-Iran) will be the dread of the entire world.

The world's leaders will be frustrated in their efforts to save what they can, but to no avail; and the people of Israel will also be petrified by the pending danger.

And HaShem will say to us, "Why are you afraid? All of this I have done in order to bring you the awaited redemption. And this redemption will not be like the redemption from Egypt which was followed by suffering. This redemption will be absolute, followed by peace".

It is fascinating to note that the Tanna, with whose words Rashi begins his commentary, and leaves us suspended in our ignorance of the future, is the same Rabbi Yitzchak in the Yalkut Shimoni who spells it out: Yisrael, Iran, the nations of the world – it's all there.

Rashi, when he chose the Midrash Tanchuma, knew what Rabbi Yitzchak says in the Midrash Shimoni; but Rashi let us "hang in mid-air", because when discussing the creation of the world it makes no sense to discuss its finale.

Rabbi Yitzchak's description of the end of history includes the major participants, as noted above, but he very discreetly refrains from divulging too many details; for this we have to go to the Gemara in tractate Avoda Zara 3a.

How with the end play out?

In future time, HaShem will mete out to each nation and individual his just reward or punishment. The reward, which will be showered upon Am Yisrael, will evoke jealousy among the nations; and HaShem will explain that the Jews who upheld the Torah even in the most intolerable circumstances earned these benefits, whereas every nation that did not keep the Torah will not benefit. The nations will reply that if they had been commanded to do so, they too would have kept the Torah. Then, in order to prove that the nations were incapable of keeping the Torah, HaShem will command them with a mitzva kala (easy mitzva) for which, if they succeed, would provide them with rich rewards. That mitzvah is sukkah.

The nations will run to build sukkot on their roofs. HaShem will then increase the heat of the sun as in the hottest summer day, and the nations will degrade the mitzva by hastily exiting the sukkot.

The rabbis in this Gemara are informing us by their golden choice of words what Rabbi Yitzchak did not wish to reveal – how the last scenes in history would play out.

At the close of the Second World War, the world's major nations established the United Nations. This organization, arising from the shambles of the League of Nations, adopted resolutions intended to guide member states in their relations with fellow nations. Foremost among these resolutions is the rule that no nation shall threaten a fellow nation.

The UN is the “mitzva kala” which the Gemara in Avoda Zara refers to, because a succa is defined as “dirat arei” (temporary dwelling as opposed to a permanent one), for the permanent one is the individual state in its geographical area, and the temporary one is its presence in the New York

building.

HaShem will “expose the heat of the sun” making it most difficult to exist in its midst. The “heat” is great moral dilemmas which will face the member states. The “hottest” of which is Iran’s threat to “erase the State of Israel from all the maps of the world”.

But the UN did not eject Iran from its membership, because it has oil and will soon possess atomic weapons. And who did they threaten anyway – Israel! The UN eluded its moral responsibilities (once again), and the end of the world order can be measured to have begun with this event.

How history will play out no one knows. But the connection between the various Midrashim and the realities of our life today are too clear to be denied.

In the end, whatever may occur, the only safe place to be is in Eretz Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom,

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