

Z-mail Parshas Beshalach

Rabbi Dovid Zauderer

END OF DAYS 101

This weekend in synagogues all around the world we read *Parshas Beshalach*, which contains in it the “Song of the Sea” – the song which the Jewish People sang to thank G-d for the Splitting of the Sea and all the other miracles that He performed for them.

As the Torah relates in Exodus 15:1:

“Az ‘*Yashir*’ Moshe U’vnei Yisrael ...Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the L-ord, and they spoke, saying, I will sing to the L-ord, for very exalted is He; a horse and its rider He cast into the sea ...”

However, there is a difficulty here in the text. The Hebrew word *Yashir* is written in the *future* tense instead of the *past* tense, so that the verse actually reads: “Then Moses and the children of Israel *will sing* this song...”

Our Rabbis of blessed memory stated: Here we find an allusion *from the Torah* to the Resurrection of the Dead (see Talmud *Sanhedrin* 91b). As we can read the verse: “Moses and the children of Israel *will sing* this song ... i.e., after they are resurrected.

[Now I know that to many of you reading this about the Resurrection of the Dead it sounds more like an episode of *The Twilight Zone*! However, I cannot tell a lie ... *the Resurrection of the Dead* (see below) is definitely part of our tradition regarding what is supposed to happen in the so-called “End of Days”. It is mentioned quite explicitly in the Book of Daniel in Chapter 12: “*And many of those who sleep in the dusty earth shall awaken ...*” It is recorded in the Talmud in *Sanhedrin* among other places. Maimonides lists the belief in the Resurrection of the Dead as one of the 13 Principles of Faith that every Jew should believe. And the Men of the Great Assembly, who created the text of the *Siddur* (Prayer Book) that has been used by virtually all Jews for the past 2000 years, incorporated the doctrine of Resurrection of the Dead into the *Shemoneh Esrei* (Silent Prayer), the focal point of the whole prayer service. In the second blessing of the silent prayer we say, “*And You are trustworthy to resuscitate the dead, Blessed are You, O G-d, Resuscitator of the Dead*”.]

Since many of us might not be familiar with the authentic Jewish version of how things are said to go down at the end of time, I present to you:

END OF DAYS 101 (The Abridged Version)

~ **The Messianic Era (otherwise known as *Yemos HaMoshiach*):** There is universal agreement among Jews regarding the meaning of the Messiah and the Messianic Era. A human being of flesh and blood and a scion of the Davidic dynasty will gather the Jewish exiles from the lands of their dispersal and return them to the Land of Israel, where he will rebuild the Holy Temple and rule over the Jews as their king. The world will then forever be at peace, show homage to the Jewish king and seek his counsel, and be filled with the knowledge of G-d like the waters that cover the sea. There is a dispute in the Talmud whether the Messianic Era will usher in a time of supernatural existence or whether the current natural order will prevail, albeit in an especially blessed and peaceful fashion. [see Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan’s *Handbook of Jewish Thought* Vol.2 pp. 360-379 to learn more about the Messianic Era].

~ **The Great Day of Judgment (otherwise known as *Yom HaDin HaGadol*):** Many passages in Scripture allude to a great day of judgment at the end of days. The Rabbis explain that every person comes before the heavenly tribunal at three stages of his existence: (1) every Rosh HaShanah, when man's material fortunes are decided according to his deeds during the preceding year; (2) at death, when the soul of every man is judged and his portion in Gehinnom or Gan Eden is fixed accordingly; (3) on the *Yom HaDin HaGadol*, the Great Day of Judgment, when all men are judged to determine whether they are worthy of Resurrection.

~ **The Resurrection of the Dead (otherwise known as *Techiyas HaMeisim*):** There is also universal agreement that the deserving soul is eternal and that a person's deeds in this world are rewarded or punished primarily in the afterlife that follows death. When a person dies, his eternal soul enters the World of Souls - *Gan Eden* for reward, and *Gehinnom* for punishment and purification. There is also universal agreement that at some point afterward, G-d will literally resurrect the dead, reuniting here on this earth the body and soul that were separated through death. [The duration of bodily life after resurrection, however, is the subject of dispute among the medieval commentaries. *Ramah*, *Ramban* and many others insist that the resurrected state is eternal. Once resurrected, the righteous will live on eternally with the body and soul united and delighted forever in the splendor of the Divine Presence. According to *Rambam* and those who follow his view, however, the eternal world is not the world of resurrection but the World of Souls. For, according to *Rambam*, the state of resurrection is *not* permanent. Rather, the resurrected will live the unusually long, happy lives of the idyllic Messianic Era that culminates life on this earth - eating, drinking, and procreating just like the people born initially in that epoch. Eventually, however, body and soul will again be separated, with the souls returning to the eternal World of Souls to delight in the Divine Presence forever.]

~ **The World to Come (otherwise known as *Olam HaBa*):** According to *Ramban* and many others, this is the era that will follow the Messianic Era in which the souls of the deserving will be united with their bodies forever to enjoy their eternal reward. There will be no eating and drinking in the World to Come, rather, "the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads and delight in the radiance of the Divine Presence" (see *Berachos* 17a). According to *Rambam*, however, the term *Olam HaBa* ("World to Come") refers broadly to the period of the Afterlife. For in *Rambam's* view, the principal setting for man's ultimate reward and punishment is not the world of resurrected life, but the World of Souls. Fundamentally, however, all agree that man's eternal state is a sublime spiritual one – whether the spiritual life of a pure soul, or that of the soul reunited with an ethereal, purified body.

Now as interesting and important as it is to know exactly what will happen to the Jewish people and to the rest of the world at the end of days, it is not *essential* to Judaism.

As Maimonides writes regarding the End of Days in his *Mishneh Torah*, The Laws of Kings and Their Wars (12:2):

"There are some Sages who say that Elijah's coming will precede the coming of the Messiah. All these and similar matters cannot be definitely known by man until they occur, for these matters are undefined in the prophets' words and even the wise men have no established tradition regarding these matters except their own interpretation of the verses. Therefore, there is a controversy among them regarding these matters.

Regardless of the debate concerning these questions, neither the order of the occurrence of these events or their precise detail are among the fundamental principles of the faith. A person should not occupy himself with the Aggados and homiletics concerning these and similar matters, nor should he consider them as essentials, for study of them will neither bring fear or love of G-d."

GOOD SHABBOS!

[Sources: Appendix English Talmud Tractate *Sanhedrin* Schottenstein Edition]
