

Parshas Tetzaveh 5763

What a week. Missile launchers on the capital mall. Fighter planes circling New York. Massive security measures everywhere. Runs on duct tape and batteries.

At such times it is somewhat difficult for a Rav to know what tone to take. On the one hand, people are nervous enough, and I don't want to add to that nervousness. On the other hand, the events are unprecedented, and we have to rise to the level of events.

We are living through amazing times. Everything that we believe impels us to acknowledge that the רבונו של עולם is talking to us through those events. The entire world is in upheaval, and we are in the epicenter.

So we need to strike a balance. Not to talk in hysterical terms, but to acknowledge that the times are extraordinary, and to consider how we, as believing Jews, should be reacting.

First and foremost, what is demanded from us is אמונה; faith that all of these events are not the result of chaos but part of the רבונו של עולם's plan, and that everything that He does is for the best. In good times we say these things as platitudes; in trying times they become profound affirmations of faith.

Second, we should recognize that these are משיח'ס צייטן. The גמרא in סנהדרין דף in גמרא says that when the trees of ארץ ישראל bear fruit again, אין לך קץ מגולה מזה, that is a revealed קץ. The Vilna Gaon explains that this does not mean that this marks the גאולה itself. The trees of ארץ ישראל have been blooming, ברוך השם, for more than half a century, and we are on code orange, and that is not the גאולה. Rather, says the גאון, what the Gemara means is this. The נביאים compare the גאולה to a birth, in which the old world give birth to the new. That is why the troubles that precede it are called by חבלי-משיח הזייל, the birthpangs of משיח. When a woman is first expecting, at the beginning, she doesn't tell anyone, she keeps the news to herself, but then she starts to show symptoms so she tells her parents and relatives and then it starts to really show and everyone realizes that a baby is on the way. The גמרא calls that stage הוכר עובר, the fetus is revealed.

When the hills of ארץ ישראל begin to bloom, says the גאון, that is the stage of הוכר עובר, when the baby starts to show. It is the stage where suddenly we start to realize that the world is pregnant with גאולה.

The baby has been showing for quite some time, the גאולה is very due, and the world is heaving in labor.

The חזון-איש was once asked if the establishment of the State of Israel marks the beginning of the גאולה. And his response was, no - the end of the גלות. I heard this story my whole life and I never understood it. What's the difference -

beginning of the גאולה, end of the גלות, isn't it just semantics. I think I understand it now. We feel the גאולה struggling to get out, we feel the contractions, we feel the upheaval. But the גאולה is not here yet.

What should be our response? Here too חז"ל speak to us. מה יעשה אדם וינצל מחבלי יעסוק בתורה; what should a person do to be spared the pain of this birth? ובגמילת חסדים. He should involve himself, herself, with Torah and with חסד. That is our first priority, that is our defense.

We should listen closely to what the government is saying. They tell us that we should stock up on water. We should do so. אין מים אלא תורה. Water for us is the life-giving water of Torah. We need to stock up on it.

The government is suggesting that we should prepare tape, to keep poison out of our homes. There is, indeed, a great deal of poison out there, hedonism and materialism, pornography and license, which seeps into our homes and poisons the atmosphere. We need to seal up our homes well, to keep it out.

The government is suggesting that we prepare a supply of food and supplies. We need, indeed, to prepare food and clothing for עניים, to involve ourselves in חסד as much as we can.

Information has become a vital issue. The government is trying to implement a program called total information awareness. That is what we need, too. Total information awareness, awareness of what information is מותר, and what falls under the heading of לשון הרע and רכילות. The חפץ חיים lived his whole life with a palpable sense of the urgency and imminence of the גאולה. And he thought it critical, to that goal, to promote greater observance of the הלכות of שמירת הלשון. The urgency is no less today.

The גמרא in מכות tell us that the last refuge of the שטן before his downfall will be in בצרה. זבח לו בבצרה. You may have heard of בצרה recently. The New York Times the other week said it is one of the most important strategic goals of a war with Iraq. The mind reels.

We are entering into the months of אדר and ניסן, the months of ישועה. We pray that these will indeed be months of ישועה for all of ישראל, and that ליהודים כן תהיה לנו - היתה אורה ושמחה וששון ויקר.