

Parshat B'Shelah

And Away We Go!!...

*By HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok.
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How long does it take to drastically change the world? How many acts, performed by how many people, does it take to change everything? Is societal change evolutionary, in that major changes take a very long time, or is societal change creationist, in that a single act can suddenly shift the course of human events forever?



If you believe that societal change is a part of nature and thus subject to an extremely slow process of survival of the fittest Darwinian style evolution, then I do not believe that I what I about to present to you will be of interest. However, if, like me, you believe in G-d and in creation (regardless of whether you accept the mythological literal version or the more authoritative scientific one), then maybe you are open to understanding that major societal changes, like creation itself, can happen in a single day.

December 7th, 1941 and September 11th, 2001 are both single days in recent history on which single events occurred that changed the world forever. Societal evolution did not follow a slow and random pattern, rather, specific human beings acted in calculating fashion to overthrow a status quo forcing almost instantaneous and permanent changes. Yes, societal evolution is subject to a creationist influence, by the hands of man, all the more so by the Hand of G-d.

The ancient saga of the exodus from Egypt in many ways shares common elements with both December 7th and 9/11. The day of the Exodus is marked on the Hebrew calendar as Passover. The Passover holiday is known by almost every Jew in the world, both today and in ancient times. One ancient Jew's alleged observance of a traditional Passover became one of the foundation stones of the Christian religion. Billions of people around the world have thus been influenced by what happened in Egypt so long ago, in ways that most of them have no idea. Societal events happen suddenly and quickly and their ramifications can be felt for millennia.

Our world today is very unsettled. There are serious problems in every segment of society. Everything is so interconnected that if there is a problem in one sector of society, its consequences do not remain isolated to that sector alone. Major ripples rumble outward exporting related troubles to other distant sectors that may be more devastated than the original societal sector in which the problem originated. Economical interests and political interests are and have always been intertwined. Now, religious interests have become involved in the game of international politics and these religious agendas use their clout to manipulate major elements of the international economy.

One such religious interest, with little financial investment managed to commandeer three airplanes and used them to impose their religious agenda, changing the world forever. The time it took them to execute their plan was only a matter of hours, the financial investment was insignificant, and the number of individuals involved was only about 20. This is societal creationism at work. This was the hand of man in action. Yet, was this not also an act from the Hand of G-d? After all, does not religion teach us that G-d is the author, Creator of all things in the universe, good and evil? Therefore, when major events happen, be it the death of innocents on 9/11, December 7th, or of the firstborn in ancient Egypt, recognize that however bizarre it may appear to us, all these tragic events are part of the greater Will of Heaven.

History has etched for us a clear path of the course of human events. Major life shifting events happen in a moment. Anyone who has ever suffered loss due to an accident knows this all too well. A single indiscretion can cause a lifetime of pain or even death. Ask someone who has been in a car accident with a drunk driver. Life pivots on unforeseeable and sudden events. We can safeguard ourselves all that we want and still we cannot safeguard ourselves from everything. This is an absolute truth. It is applicable on the individual level and on the societal level. A single event, even one unconnected to us personally can still ripple through life and society and have a major impact upon those far removed. And there is little, if anything, one can do to protect oneself from such fallout and harm.

Life is and always has been unsettling. There are no guarantees of safety and security. There can never be any such guarantees. Societal faith in their government's abilities to provide law and order and to defend the common good is mostly an illusion. Even the strictest of police states and dictatorship cannot stop acts of crime or violent political dissent. Even the most dictatorial powers can only punish aggressors. With all their cruelty, they cannot make aggression disappear forever.

Even if the new world order creates its one world government, it will still not be immune to societal creationist change, brought about by the handful of those who managed to slip between the cracks. Big brother is indeed mighty and strong. He is wise and has learned well from all the political failures of the past. Big brother has vowed never to be caught and defeated in the manner as was Pharaoh in ancient Egypt. Big brother is truly big and his first endeavor is to get society to focus on him so as to blur out any vision of Big Father.

Yes, life and politics, it is all very similar to a grand game of chess. One player makes a subtle move, followed by an even more subtle move by the opposite player. Right now, big brother and Big Father are engaged in such a game and we are all their pawns.

The lessons of the past are our warnings for the future. Indeed, those who have not learned from the lessons of the past are destined to repeat them. There really is nothing new under the sun. What has been will be again. The Egyptians lived in comfort and conceived security and it was all stripped away in a matter of months by a man named Moses. The peoples of Sodom and Gomorra also lived in peace and conceived security until one morning they did not wake up in their beds. They all were killed by some natural disaster, also known as the Hand of G-d. I guess we could also add to our examples the sudden explosion of the volcano, Mt. Vesuvius in ancient Italy. In a matter of minutes the secure and relatively happy life in the city of Pompeii came to an abrupt end.

Many other such examples are recorded throughout history. Who then can be so arrogant to say that society today is so safe, so secure, and so strong, that nothing sudden will ever topple it? Such a view is ridiculous and delusional. It is actually also very dangerous. For the one who embraces delusional security will never see the real threats coming. They will overtake one and destroy his/her life and the individual will often never know what hit them. This is what happened to the Jews in Nazi Europe.

Let me state here, that what I am writing is clearly a commentary on Biblical events. However, unlike many other Rabbis, I am not interested in sharing with you a story, or an embellished retelling of long ago history. I am not concerned with quoting to you the various opinions of other Rabbis or trying to impress you with my academic profundity and accomplishments. All these are not the way Torah was meant to be taught. These methods are nothing more than distractions blinding the eyes from seeing what the Torah is really all about and what it is saying to us today.

Torah is not a history book. It is a warning. It is a psychological guide to the workings of humankind on the individual and societal basis. All the stories and embellishments are nice, but they can lull one into a sense of false security. One studies and walks away saying how nice it is that G-d is in control of everything and that whatever happens will be for the greater good, the end, amen. Now, this is, of course, true. However does anyone realize just how devastating such a conclusion can be on one's personal life? Usually it takes a personal tragedy for one to get the message that G-d is very much in control, for both good and evil. And yes, bad things do happen to good people, all the time. It is not haphazard, it is not random; it is absolutely by the Hand of Heaven, even if it happens through the little hands of big brother.

Torah is an ancient warning for us in each and every generation. Mighty Pharaohs have been toppled in the past. Evil empires have risen and fallen; they conquer the Earth for a time and then after a few short years are lost to history and forgotten forever. As it was in the past, so will it be in the future. There is nothing new under the sun. What happened before will happen again. This is the great cycle of nature, as ordained by nature's Creator.

Changes do come and they come suddenly, without much warning to individuals. Sometimes changes come in the form of natural disasters and sometimes in the guise of human behavior. Whatever it is, it is the Hand and Will of Heaven.

Nations are devastated. Societies are ruined. Millions of lives are changed forever with just as many dying in the interim. And then, after the rumbling subsides, rebuilding occurs, the past is forgotten, stability is pursued and the illusion of its presence remains, at least until the next eruption of creationist evolution.

Yes, this is a Biblical commentary. I am not telling you about the past, I am trying to warn you about the future, very possibly about something big, not too far off in time. I am no prophet, therefore I have no predictions. I cannot proclaim to you that this or that will happen, in such a place at this or that specific time. We do not have prophecy like this today. G-d took prophecy away from us a long time ago.

It seems that G-d has already said to us everything that He has intended. All we need to know is written in His Torah and the Bible. All we need to know about the future we will find in the words from the past. All we need to do is learn to read them correctly. For although new prophecy has ceased, old prophecy still speaks to us today. Prophecy lives on in the words of the past prophets. When we read the words of Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zecharia and the others, keep this in mind. They did not speak about the past; no, they were speaking to us today, to big brother and all his hosts.

The prophets of old warned the masters of today that like the masters of their days, today's masters would meet a similar fate, suddenly and without warning. After all, the warnings have already been given, thousands of years ago. But, who is paying attention? Who is reading Torah and the Bible with prophetic eyes? Those who do will see what is coming down the path of history, heading speedily towards us like an uncontrollable storm. They will prepare themselves for the coming storm. Others will reinforce their sense of delusional security and further blind their eyes and stop up their ears.

So be it. It is not like this too has not happened countless times before throughout history. As it was, so will it be. This is the message of the Bible and this week's Torah commentary. I might not be very academically stimulating, but forgive me, I'd rather awaken you to the truth of Torah and its relevant message for today than merely put you to sleep with a nice story.