



GEULAS YISRAEL

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When the World Shifts

Is it possible to forget your name? Can an event be so dramatic and overwhelming that you forget everything?

Har Sinai was an event of this scale. The ten plagues and the supernatural splitting of the sea debunked ancient pagan notions that gods resembled Man. It was now patently clear that Hashem was transcendent and existed beyond human imagination.

We still wondered whether a human being, formed from flesh and blood, could speak with Hashem and survive the encounter. Har Sinai, with all its fiery spectacle, made it clear that such a scenario was possible. Har Sinai completely shifted the paradigm, by demonstrating that a G-d who was beyond this world, nonetheless, spoke to Man. The world now believed in direct divine communication, both at a mass level, and through divinely selected nevi'im. Everything after Har Sinai was different.

One day we will all experience a similar global paradigm shift. In the leadup to the Messianic era, human consciousness will be transformed. There is much debate amongst Rishonim as to whether the Messianic era will be an apocalyptic overhaul. Will the entire world order be revamped and replaced by a different reality? Or will the basic foundation of our reality remain intact with minor

alterations? Either way, a major shift of consciousness will occur. The entire world will experience a spiritual revival, return to Hashem, and acknowledge the Jews as the chosen people with rights to Israel. Democracy will be replaced by a Moshiach, who will serve as a benevolent monarch under the authority of Heaven. Animal sacrifices, which in our current culture feel abhorrent, will become re-popularized. The shift will be so dramatic that we will almost forget what it was like to live in the old order.

Which returns us to the original question: can a person undergo an experience so jarring and destabilizing that they forget their name? Chazal describe the experience of ascending to Heaven for final judgement after we pass from this world. During our lives we spin false narratives to justify our religious breakdowns or to rewrite our failures as successes. In Heaven, standing in front of Hashem, these false narratives run hollow. Standing before Hashem we see ourselves and our lives for what they were- with all the waste and squandered opportunities. We will become so flustered and panic-struck by the shattering of our precious, long-held narratives that we will even forget our names. Everything will change and we will barely remember the world we once inhabited.

OCT 7TH CHANGED EVERYTHING

We have just lived through a major paradigm shift. It has caused us all to lose our equilibrium. On Oct 7th the ground shifted from under us. It is difficult to even remember

what life was like before this crushing day. Everything we believed in was proven wrong. We never imagined that Jews would be tortured and ravaged in our own country. Rape, hostages, and mutilation of dead bodies were scenes from our tortured past in *gallus* without a Jewish army to protect us. Though before Oct 7th we had experienced painful tragedies, we could never imagine the horror of the past 2000 years revisiting us in Israel.

For the past 75 years we became intoxicated with a thrilling redemptive process, believing that we were triumphantly surging toward a Messianic conclusion, with few barriers in our path. We never imagined that the process could take such a sudden and tragic twist. We believed that we had constructed an impenetrable wall, capable of keeping bloodthirsty killers away from our peace-loving citizens. We assumed that our Arab neighbors had more interest in their own welfare, than in spilling our blood. All of these assumptions proved wrong. So much of what we had envisioned before Oct 7th proved to be wrong.

Fortunately, several other pre-Oct 7th conceptions also proved to be wrong. We thought that what divided our people was stronger than what united us. This proved untrue, as Israelis across the political, social, ethnic, and religious spectrum rallied to defend our people and our Homeland.

The paradigm shift of Oct 7th reminded us never to assume that our world is static and permanent. There are large-scale events which radically transform human consciousness, forever changing the way we view our world. For those who have difficulty envisioning redemptive transformation, Oct 7th is a harsh reminder of how sudden and completely things can change.



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1940-1950

In truth, in the middle of the 20th century, our people experienced dramatic changes and paradigm shifts of Jewish history. Imagine a 5-year long Oct 7th! The Holocaust altered the entire Jewish imagination. A few years later, Jewish consciousness was once again reinvented by the formation of the State of Israel. These two paradigm-shifts changed everything. Life before the Holocaust and without the State of Israel was so different from life in the modern Jewish world that it is almost as if the two eras occurred on different planets.

Viewing the Holocaust and the State of Israel as major paradigm shifts impacts the way we regard ideological statements issued before these two major events. Often, ideological positions articulated in the pre-WWII era are simplistically applied to our very different modern

context. The Jewish world prior to 1940 was so radically different from the post-1950 world that simply cutting and pasting ideological statements from one period to another is folly.

My revered Rebbe, Rav Amital, often issued this warning about directly invoking Rav Kook regarding modern issues. Rav Kook envisioned a rosy and dreamy redemptive process marked by our magical return to Israel, accompanied by a global redemptive surge in culture, science, politics, and diplomacy. For him, Jewish secular nationalism contained a seed of religious revival, which would soon germinate.

Rav Kook passed away in 1935, and never witnessed the horrors of the Holocaust. Also, he never witnessed the founding of the State of Israel, led in part, by factions which were overtly and ardently anti-religious. He didn't live to see the violent wars of destruction launched by the Arab world in opposition to our peaceful return to Israel. Simply copying Rav Kook's ideas from the pre-WWII era to the modern era is reckless and flawed.

The same caution should be applied when quoting Torah personalities of pre-WWII Europe. Many expressed harsh opposition to Zionism. Much of their opposition was in response to the aggressive political jockeying of Zionist organizations back in Europe, which disrupted traditional Orthodox life and destabilized the authority of the Rabbinical establishment.

It is anyone's guess what these Torah personalities who opposed Zionism would have felt had they lived through the past 75 years of the State of Israel. Witnessing 7 million Jews return to Israel and the flourishing of Israel as a national and religious epicenter, would they have expressed such

disagreement? What would they have said after Oct 7th? It is impossible to know, but simply lifting their statements from 1890 or from 1920 feels foolish.

Too often, those who believe that the State of Israel is a redemptive experience find it difficult to identify with Torah giants from pre-WWII who weren't pro-Zionist or who were radically opposed to Zionism. There is so much to learn from their Torah and their legacy, but, sadly, they are often overlooked or even dismissed, simply because their pre-WWII views don't stack up with modern religious views. They lived in a dramatically different world and their ideological opinions from then may be very different today.

I deeply identify with Rav Elchanan Wasserman, one of the leading Torah giants of the pre-WWII era who was tragically murdered in the Holocaust. My grandfather studied in his yeshiva, and hosted his Rosh Yeshiva when he visited the United States in the middle of the war. I feel a deep kinship with this Torah leader who I never met, but who so deeply impacted my life. Studying his Torah is a deeply spiritual experience for me.

Known as a radical, he was deeply opposed to Zionism of any form— even religious Zionism. I strongly support the State of Israel and my children enthusiastically serve in the IDF, yet I feel little dissonance with this Torah genius. I can't speak in his name, but it is clear that he inhabited a very different world than the one I live in. His adopting radically different positions in that world doesn't make me assume that he would maintain those positions in the very different planet we inhabit.

Things change. Paradigms shift. Oct 7th struck that point home very clearly. ■