

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Balak 5768

"I see it but not now, I look upon it but it is not close: a star will shoot from Yaakov and a tribe will arise from Yisroel, and he will smite the corners of Moav, and gouge out all the children of Shais." (24:17)

Furthermore, the Ohr Hachaim only says that if the Jewish people do not deserve an early redemption, moshiach will arrive in a natural way. But what moshiach does after he arrives will not be natural – we see that the Ohr Hachaim says that the rest of the verse about conquering the entire world applies even to the scenario of a natural arrival of moshiach.

Similarly, the redemption from Egypt, with the Ten Plagues and the Parting of the Sea, was certainly not natural. Yet when Moshe first arrived on the scene, he came in a humble way, riding a donkey, appearing before Pharaoh respectfully and asking him to free the Children of Israel. At the beginning, Pharaoh and his magicians just laughed at Moshe and Ahron and refused to listen.

Zionists make a similar error regarding the Yerushalmi (Berachos 4b), which says that Rabbi Chiya Rabbah and Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta were walking together at dawn, and Rabbi Chiya Rabbah said that the redemption of the Jewish people will be similar to the dawn: "So is the redemption of Israel. At first, little by little; and as it continues it gets bigger and bigger."

Many Zionists have used this passage as a basis for their claim that the redemption is a long process that will begin before the coming of moshiach, through natural means. However, nothing in this passage or anywhere else indicates that this slow redemption will happen before moshiach comes. The Sages are teaching that the redemption process initiated by moshiach – not beforehand - will have to be in stages so as not to overwhelm us with the full light of redemption all at

The Ohr Hachaim interprets this verse as referring to the two possible redemption scenarios discussed in the Gemara, Sanhedrin 98a. The Gemara there quotes the verse, "I am Hashem, in its time I will hasten it" (Yishaya 60:22) and expounds: if the Jewish people deserve it, G-d will hasten the redemption, and if they do not deserve it, it will come in its time. If the Jewish people deserves it, moshiach will come "with the clouds of heaven" (Daniel 7:13); if not, he will come as "a poor man riding a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9).

Here too, says the Ohr Hachaim, Bilam foresaw these two possibilities and said, "I see it but not now" – it will happen not now but soon; this refers to a speedy redemption that the Jews deserve. "I look upon it but it is not close" refers to a redemption at the latest possible date, when the Jews do not deserve it. (This means they do not repent before the arrival of moshiach. However, they will certainly have to repent before moshiach begins gathering in the exiles; see Parsha Pearls Rosh Hashanah 5767.) In the speedy scenario, "a star will shoot from Yaakov" - moshiach will appear from heaven like a star. In the delayed scenario, "a tribe will arise from Yisroel" – in a natural way, like a poor man riding a donkey. The rest of the verse – "and he will smite the corners of Moav and gouge out all the children of Shais" – as well as the other verses, apply to both scenarios.

Some Zionists mistakenly think that the Ohr Hachaim is painting a picture of a natural redemption, similar to the process leading up to the Zionist state and its exploits. Nothing could be further from the truth; he is merely explaining the scenario mentioned by the Gemara of moshiach coming "as a poor man riding a donkey." He is not talking about any part of the redemption happening before the coming of moshiach.

Parting of the Sea, and it reached its climax at the Giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. It had to happen this way because otherwise, the Jewish nation, after so many years of living in the defilement of Egyptian society, could not have tolerated the great, blinding light of the revelation at Sinai. (Vayoel Moshe, Chapter 69)

once, just as the sun rises slowly so as not to overwhelm the eye with so much light all at once.

We find the same concept in the redemption from Egypt. The process began humbly with Moshe and Ahron standing before Pharaoh. The revelation became greater with the miraculous plagues, then greater still at the

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