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WRAPPING UP HISTORY: YISHMAEL, EDM, AND THE LAST ERA

WRITTEN BY RABBI SHAY TAHAN

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As we bring the year to a close, it seems like not only the year is ending, but history and the world as well.

Looking back, it is fascinating to see the enormous number of events that took place. From the beginning of massive demonstrations in Israel aimed at overturning the government, to the horrific, brutal attack in south Israel against the Jewish people, and the growing venom of anti-Jewish and antisemitic demonstrations that spread like wildfire around the world. The war against seven different enemies—including Gaza, Lebanon, Iran, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Judea and Samaria—opened an eighth front: international pressure, starting in Europe and extending to the UN and the International Court. This is just a part of the list, but it goes far beyond that, without even mentioning other world's significant events such as the Ukraine-Russia war, the resignation of the U.S. president, the conviction of the former president, and the indictment of the New York mayor. The sheer number of events that historically would take generations to unfold all happened in the span of one short year. It clearly feels like Hashem is preparing to "close the shop," running a liquidation sale to end this journey and bring the redemption.

The holy Chafetz Chaim once said that as the end of time approaches, Hashem accelerates events to bring everything to a close. Just as people rush to complete many tasks as Friday afternoon nears Shabbat, so too does the pace quicken as the day of history draws to an end.

Let's look back at history and see how the small Jewish nation survived exile under the four empires, as mentioned in various places in the Torah and by Chazal. By examining their prophecies in relation to our time, we can try to understand where we find ourselves positioned within that framework.

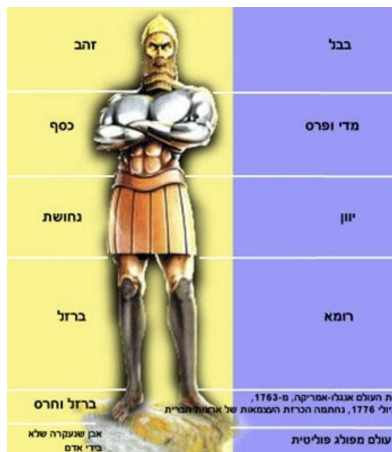
The Torah and Jewish tradition, especially through the interpretations of Chazal, mention four major empires

that will rule over the world before the coming of the final redemption. These empires are referred to in various prophetic texts and are understood as the dominant world powers that would subjugate the Jewish people throughout history. This concept is derived from visions in the Book of Daniel and elaborated on in the Talmud and other rabbinic writings.

Daniel's prophecies:

In the book of Daniel, the prophet shares visions that focus on future world empires and the ultimate redemption of the Jewish people. In one key vision (Chapter 2), Daniel interprets a statue with four sections—gold, silver, bronze, and iron mixed with clay—symbolizing four successive empires, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, that will dominate the world and subjugate the Jewish people. Another vision (Chapter 7) describes four beasts, also representing these empires. The prophecies highlight that after these empires fall,

Hashem's eternal kingdom will be established, bringing the Messianic era.



The Four Empires:

1. Babylonian Empire (Bavel):

- The first empire is Babylon, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed the First Temple in Jerusalem and exiled the Jewish people to Babylon. The Babylonian Empire is viewed as the beginning of the era of exile and subjugation for the Jewish nation.

- This is based on the dream of Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of the prophet Daniel (Chapter 2), where Babylon is symbolized by the head of gold in a statue representing world empires.

2. Persian-Median Empire (Paras u'Madai):

- The second empire is the Persian-Median Empire, which conquered Babylon under King Cyrus (Koresh) and allowed the Jewish people to return

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to Israel and rebuild the Second Temple. Despite this kindness, the Persian Empire is still viewed as an empire that subjugated Israel.

- In Daniel's visions, Persia is often represented by the chest and arms of silver in the statue (Daniel 2), and by the bear in Daniel 7.

3. Greek Empire (Yavan):

- The third empire is the Greek Empire, led to cultural persecution and the events of the Hanukkah story. Hellenistic influence threatened Jewish identity, and the Greeks attempted to impose their culture and religion on the Jewish people.

- In Daniel's vision, Greece is symbolized by the belly and thighs of bronze (Daniel 2), and by the leopard (Daniel 7).

4. Roman Empire (Edom):

- The fourth and final empire is the Roman Empire, which destroyed the Second Temple and exiled the Jewish people once again. Rabbinic tradition associates Rome with "Edom," based on the descent of Rome from Esav and sees it as the longest and harshest exile, which continues in various forms today.

- Rome is depicted as the legs of iron and the feet of iron mixed with clay (Daniel 2), symbolizing its strength but also its eventual division and fragility. In Daniel 7, Rome is represented by a terrifying, beast-like creature with iron teeth.

These four empires—Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome—are seen as successive powers that ruled over the world and subjugated the Jewish people. Each empire represents a stage in Jewish exile, and rabbinic tradition holds that after the fall of the fourth empire (Rome/Edom), the Messianic era will begin. The unfolding of these historical events is viewed through the lens of divine providence and prophecy, marking the stages leading up to ultimate redemption.

Yishmael

Reading the above, it seems that Yishmael is not mentioned as an empire, even though Yishmael represents one of the two largest religions in the world and holds a significant amount of territory in the Middle East and Africa. Why isn't Yishmael counted as a fifth empire?

Let's begin by mentioning that according to Rav Saadia Gaon and the Ibn Ezra, Yishmael is indeed counted as an empire. The Ibn Ezra also explains Daniel's second vision of the four animals, interpreting the last beast with ten horns as a reference to the empire of Yishmael. The ten horns symbolize how it will spread across the entire world.

The prophet continues, showing that while the four empires lost their rule gradually, Yishmael's downfall will occur in an instant. We may have already seen a glimpse of this when Israel took out the mighty Hezbollah in three days without even putting boots on the ground.

Our question is regarding all other commentaries that do not consider Yishmael as an empire.

The Ramban explains that the empires mentioned in our sources are only those nations that conquered the world, ruling from their predecessors. Each of those mentioned took over from the previous empire, but Yishmael never did. Although Yishmael is a large and populated nation, it has always remained in the shadow of Edom

and never took over from it.

A deeper explanation can be found in the Maharal (Ner Mitsva), who opens a gate to understanding the entire concept of these four empires and why Chazal were concerned with explaining the sequence of events that seem to be unrelated to the study of Torah but rather pertain to history. Chazal's role, as known, was to learn and teach Torah, not history or world events.

The Maharal explains that the concept of empires has a divine meaning. The sequence of events is as follows: When Avraham Avinu discovered that there is a Creator, he began preaching and teaching this to the entire world. Gradually, Avraham became an influential figure as people from all over were drawn to his teachings, making him powerful and influential. He was a true leader, not through ruling over people in the traditional sense, but by influencing them to crown him as their leader, hence Hashem has crowned him as a king. This kingdom was not merely about political power; it was a divine rule with a spiritual impact on all of creation. It marked the first time in history that Hashem's plan was being enacted in the world.

This divine inspiration was passed down to Avraham's followers and descendants until the end of time. However, something tragic happened along the course of history. The Babylonians fought with Israel, destroyed the Temple, and took over the kingdom from Israel. Not only was Israel exiled, but the Divine Presence (Shechinah) was also exiled. From that point until the arrival of Mashiach, Hashem's presence is considered to be in exile. The kingdom was taken from Israel, and over the course of history, it was ruled by four different empires, each taking power from the one before.

Now, speaking about Yishmael, they never had to take over the empire, and therefore, they are not mentioned as one of the empires. The reason they didn't, says the Maharal, is because they themselves were descendants of Avraham Avinu and thus possessed a sense of royalty in their own right.

The prophecy of Daniel did include the nation of Yishmael, the son of Avraham and Hagar, considered the progenitor of the Arab nations and, by extension, the Islamic world. The feet of the statue that Nebuchadnezzar saw were partially made of metal and partially of clay. The metal symbolizes Edom, while the clay represents Yishmael. This conveys the message that, at the very end of time, Yishmael and Edom will be the last two forces to rule over the world.

Thus, there is a dispute in the Gemara (Yuma 10a) regarding whether Edom or Yishmael (presented as Persia—today's Iran) will rule over the entire world at the very end of history. This debate arises from the fact that the feet of the statue contained both metal and clay.

At the end of the prophecy, the statue is broken by a stone, representing an eternal kingdom led by an "old man" who takes the rule for eternity, symbolizing the coming of Mashiach.

Fortunately, there is a happy ending that unfolds at the end of time—the arrival of Mashiach and the final redemption, which will bring the full revelation of Hashem to the world. Based on the prophecies mentioned above and many other statements by Chazal, it seems closer than ever. We are living in a historical moment, witnessing the last and final stage of the world.

May we all indeed witness the return of Hashem to Zion in the upcoming new year. Amen.

NAVIGATING HALACHIC CHALLENGES IN THE SHOFAR BLOWING

There are some very important halachot concerning both those who blow the shofar and those who listen. Some of these halachot, if not followed properly, can render the shofar sound invalid, and neither the congregation nor the blower may even realize this due to ignorance, as they have not studied the relevant laws.

This is very important, as our fate depends on this mitzvah. Chazal explain that when Hashem hears the sound of the shofar, He judges us more favorably, transforming His judgment from harsh to merciful.

The sequence of shofar blasts is divided into three parts:

1. **Tashat:** Teki'ah - Shevarim - Teki'ah.
2. **Tarat:** Teki'ah - Teru'ah - Teki'ah.
3. **Tashrat:** Teki'ah - Shevarim - Teru'ah - Teki'ah.

One of the most important concerns when blowing the shofar is ensuring that each of the three sh'varim is blown with the correct length—neither too short nor too long. Since each of the nine t'ruah sounds is a short sound, each of the sh'varim sounds must be longer than a t'ruah; otherwise, it is not considered a proper shevar but rather a t'ruah. On the other hand, the sh'varim should not be too long, as it could be considered a t'kiyah.

Secondly, the long t'kiyah sound must be at least the length of nine short sounds; if it is shorter than that, the t'kiyah is not valid. One may extend the t'kiyah if desired, but care must be taken not to make it shorter than the required length.

The length of the Teki'ah should be at least as long as the middle sounds. For Tashrat, which includes both Shevarim and Teru'ah, the Teki'ah must be doubled in length (Shulchan Aruch Siman ,ג, תקצ, Mishnah Berurah טו ס"ק). If the Baal Tokeah inadvertently blows extra Teru'ah sounds, the Teki'ah must be longer to match that length (שפת אמת ר"ה לג, ב). If done incorrectly, one can still fulfill the requirement if the Teki'ah matches the length of a minimum

Teru'ah sound (Sha'ar HaTziyun 'א).

The number of Teru'ah blows is crucial, requiring a minimum of nine sounds. If fewer than nine are produced, the Teru'ah is invalid, and great care should be taken to ensure the complete set is performed.



Breathing while blowing the shofar also matters. During Shevarim, one must not inhale between blasts, as it invalidates the sequence. There is a machloket regarding breathing between Shevarim and Teru'ah in the Tashrat sequence. The Shulchan Aruch advises that during the first set (seated), one should avoid breathing, while during the second set, it is permissible (Shulchan Aruch Siman תקצ). This practice is observed by both Sephardim and most Ashkenazim, although some Ashkenazi communities breathe during all sets.

Congregation members must be aware of which sound belongs to which set to fulfill their obligation. For example, if the Baal Tokeah finishes a set of tashat with the last t'kiyah but wants to repeat the t'kiyah because he is not satisfied with how he blew it, those listening might mistakenly think he is starting tarat, which also begins with a t'kiyah. According to many opinions, if the listeners intend for the wrong order, it could invalidate the sound for those who were mistaken (לקט יושר עמוד קכה ומשמעות ש"ע הרב סימן תקצ סק"ג). Some poskim suggest that each individual should focus their intent and rely on the intent of the Baal Tokeah to perform the proper sequences. (Siman 590 Dirshu 17).

The Shulchan Aruch Harav (סעיף ז') stresses that the three Shevarim blasts should be of equal length, ensuring uniformity to avoid one sound being too short or long compared to the others.

PREPARING FOR A BUG-FREE ROSH HASHANAH: A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO SIMANIM

On Rosh Hashanah, we eat various types of vegetables known as "simanim," which require careful inspection for bugs. The last thing we want to do on the Day of Judgment is consume bugs, as this is considered a significant sin that hinders our spiritual connection with Hashem. Let's go through the list and learn how to keep these vegetables bug-free (Based on the teachings of Rabbi Moshe Vaya).

Black-eyed peas (Rubia)

Black-eyed peas can sometimes be heavily infested, so it's essential to inspect them thoroughly.

Boiling: Boil the black-eyed peas in a pot with water, using three times the amount of water compared to the peas. After boiling, turn off the heat and leave the pot covered for about three hours.

Inspection: Spread about 10-15 peas on your hand and examine if there is a dark spot under the thin peel.



Next place the other hand on the peas, turn your hands over, and check the other side of the peas now visible. If you notice a dark spot under the peel, peel it off and check for any insects.

Note that the black spot on the peel of the pea is part of its natural growth, and superficial brown or orange spots are not a sign of infestation.

Leek (Karti)

A. Cut and remove the green leaves.

B. Cut and remove the root area (about one centimeter) at the other end.

C. Cut and remove the first outer layer.

Then slice the central white part of the karti lengthwise, separate all the layers, and soak them in water with a little liquid soap for 2-3 minutes. Rinse each layer under running water while gently rubbing both sides with your fingers along their length.

Inspect the layers to ensure there are no signs of leaf miners,

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which create tunnel-like patterns through the layers.

Dates (Tamar)

Dried Dates: Cut the fruit lengthwise, open it up, and remove the pit. Hold the open date against a light source (a window or bulb) and inspect both its inner and outer sides for insects. The date becomes translucent when held up to the light, allowing you to easily see any bugs that may be present.

In aged dates, white sugar crystals form, which are not a sign of infestation.

Fresh Date: Large dates that are sold refrigerated, have smooth skin, and are dark brown in color—usually clean and do not require inspection.

Pomegranate

Pomegranates are usually clean therefore a simple Examination can be done of whether there is a hole in the skin of the fruit, which is a sign of a worm's entry. Open the pomegranate, and if we see a brown area, we check between the seeds for the presence of a worm. Dark superficial spots on the seeds of the pomegranate are not a sign of infestation.

Spinach Leaves (Silka)

The vegetable is infested with many insects, therefore, it is recommended to use only leaves from special "worm-free" cultivation, under certified supervision. Soak them in water with a little liquid soap and wash each leaf thoroughly.

If you decide to clean them anyway, soak the leaves in soapy water for 3-5 minutes, then rinse them well under a heavy stream of water. After that, soak them in clean water for 10 minutes while agitating them. Finally, check the water either with a cloth or by observing it for bugs. This technique should only be performed by those who have learned how to do it and trained their eyes to recognize what the very small bugs look like.

Fish Head

The head of a carp, mullet, or gray mullet—only heads sold in a store under strict supervision should be used. For a salmon head, it should be deveined to remove the gills, rinsed thoroughly, and checked for brown parasites about 2-5 cm long (this can also occur in fish sold under strict supervision).

Salmon also has many long worms called Anisakis. According to Rav Belsky and OU policy, the Anisakis worm is not forbidden, but other rabbis do forbid it. It goes without saying that it's beyond disgusting when a long worm comes up on the fork while eating the fish.

Other fish heads are usually clean.

ספרדי בסליחות עם אשכנזים ולהיפך.

האמת. אמנם המנהגים שנהגו בשרשי התפילה אין לשנות ממנהג מקומו, כי י"ב שנים בשמים וכו'. הנה לפנינו מעשה רב מהאר"י ז"ל שיש חילוק בין פיוטים ופזמונים לתפילה. וחשוב לציין שעיקר הסליחות הם י"ג מדות רחמים שנאמרים אצל כל עדות ישראל.

וכיון שענין סליחות הוא לעורר את הלב לתשובה, לכן אם אדם מרגיש התעלות בנוסח האחר ודאי שיש בזה טעם לשבח לאמרם באופן שהדברים משפיעים עליו מאשר לאמרם בנוסח אחר שאינו מעורר אותו. וכתב הגר"ע יוסף (חזו"ע ימים נוראים עמוד כ) שעיקר אמירת הסליחות צריכה להיות בכוונה ובמיתון ובהכנעה יתירה. ואלה שאונסין עצמם מן השינה ובאים לבית הכנסת להשמיע במרום קולם בקול רינה ואומרים הסליחות בקול רם ונישא כדרך ששרים פיוטים ונגינות הרי הם יורדים תרתי גהנום, שמאבדים שינתם ללא תועלת, ויוצא שחרם בהפסדם כי הלא זה שמם 'סליחות', ולא 'צעקות'.

ומסופר על הגאון רש"י אורבך (ר"ה עמוד ב) שהיה מחזר אחר

בית כנסת שמתפללים בהתעוררות ובמתינות שאז יכל לכוון טוב יותר באמירת הסליחות, ולמדנו שהעיקר הוא כוונת הלב.

שלום לרב. האם ספרדי שמרגיש התעוררות והתעלות יתירה בסליחות במנין אשכנזי, וכן להיפך אשכנזי בסליחות של הספרדים, רשאי לומר סליחות עימהם?

הנה בתפלה יש לכל אחד לנהוג כמנהג עדתו ולא לשנות, דהיינו ספרדי ינהג כמנהג ונוסח הספרדים, ואשכנזי כנוסח האשכנזים. ולכן ספרדי המתפלל במנין אשכנזי יתפלל כנוסח הספרדים וכן להיפך. אכן בסליחות יש להקל אם ספרדי נמצא במנין אשכנזי ולהיפך להתפלל עם הציבור, אף שהסליחות הם בנוסח שונה לחלוטין. וראיתי שהגאון הרב יצחק יוסף שליט"א כתב (ימים נוראים עמוד סב) שאין לספרדי לשנות את נוסח הסליחות לאומרום בנוסח אשכנזי, ולכן בן ישיבה ספרדי הנמצא בישיבה אשכנזית יאמר עמהם הסליחות אך בנוסח הספרדי, ודימה זאת לנוסח התפילה שהובא בספרים שישנם י"ב שנים ברקיע שדרכם עולים התפילות, ולכל שבת יש שער מיוחד שבו נכנסת התפילה, אולם התפילה הספרדית בוקעת ונכנסת בכל י"ב שנים שברקיע.

אכן אחר המחילה, נראה שדברים אלו נאמרו לענין תפילה בלבד ולא לסליחות שהם פיוטים ופזמונים. וכך כתב המגן אברהם (סימן סח): "האר"י ז"ל לא היה אומר פיוטים ופזמונים אלא מה שסידרו הראשונים, כגון הקלירי שנתקנו ע"ד



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