

CHAZAK

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

In the world of Torah, there is no such thing as coincidence. G-d runs the world, and He actively involves Himself in the everyday affairs of man. The only difference between our generation and previous generations with respect to this idea is how revealed His hand in our lives appears to us. In previous generations, there might have been no mistaking the hand of G-d; in our generation it is harder to see this.

It is also no coincidence that this week's parshios, Mattos and Ma'asei (we read two parshios this week), are read during the infamous Three Weeks, which began last Tuesday with the fast day of the seventeenth of Tammuz, and which will end, G-d willing, with the fast day on the ninth of Av-Tisha B'Av. This is the time of the year that we curtail festivities and dampen our spirits in order to appropriately mourn the destruction of the two Temples, and exile in general. However, the question is always, what connection is there between the events recorded in the parshios and our current period of time?

The truth is, there are quite a few connections. To begin with, the parsha speaks about the young maiden who makes a vow while still living with her father, or, after she has become engaged to her future husband. As a daughter in her father's house, her father has the right to nullify her vows as he sees fit, a power he loses once she becomes married. This section of the laws of vows is located in this week's parsha for other more specific reasons. However, perhaps by drawing a parallel between the Jewish people and the young maiden, we can hear what this parsha has to say about exile and redemption as well.

While still single and in her father's house, the young girl is subject to the will of her father. Though her future husband awaits the day that he will become married to her, still, until such time, he cannot interfere with the will of the father. This is not unlike the Jewish people, whom, while living in the "house" of the Nations of the World, that is, in exile, is subject to the will and whims of the host nations, to the point that it becomes almost impossible to properly fulfill the will of G-d, and to the point that it can appear as if G-d has no say in our well-being.

However, once the maiden becomes engaged (through Kiddushin) to her future husband, the power of the "father" is weakened. However, though he may not retain absolute authority over his daughter,

as long as the marriage is not yet consummated and she is still at home, annulment of the vows still requires him as well, albeit in partnership with the husband. So too, as the Jewish people turn their hearts toward G-d, the power of the Nations over us is somewhat weakened, and the will of G-d is somewhat strengthened, so-to-speak. Perhaps we are living through such a period now, when Jews are freer today to carry out the mitzvos than ever before.

The last stage is when the maiden leaves her father's home altogether to live the life of a married woman with her loving husband. At such a point, the father ceases to have any right to deter the will of his daughter, a right that has been turned over entirely to the daughter's husband. So too, once the Jewish people will turn the hearts entirely over to their loving G-d, and become reunited with Him, the Nations of the World will lose **ALL** power over us, and we will reach a level of spiritual freedom like never before. Then we will **WANT** to fulfill Torah, and will be **ABLE** to do so, totally unobstructed. We should see such days in our lifetimes!

This, of course, is the concept of geulah (redemption), which we still long for to this very day. This last exile has been the longest of them all, which is why the midrash refers to it as "the deep" (mentioned in the second verse of the creation story of Bereishis). We are living in the **FINAL EXILE**, and hopefully, G-d willing, we will live to witness the **FINAL REDEMPTION** to be ushered in by the Moshiach himself.

Shabbos Day:

But how do we go about triggering the geulah? Is there anything we can do in the first place? The answer to these questions can be drawn out of the section in this week's parsha dealing with karshus-**YES**, kashrus!

In this week's parsha, we are instructed in many of the principles concerning make treif utensils kosher. The Jewish people had been sent on the mission to avenge themselves against Bilaam and the people of Midyan for the catastrophic episode at the end of Parashas Balak (two weeks ago). They were entirely successful, and brought back plenty of spoils of war, some of which included pots and other cooking vessels that had been used for treif. Were they useable? Did they have to be destroyed?

The answer was, and is, that for the most part, there is a way to kasher a treif utensil. The operating principle here is: As it was absorbed, that's how it comes out.

According to the Torah, if treif food is cooked, let's say, in a pot over a fire, the walls of the pot absorb food particles. This is what makes the pot treif in itself, even if it is emptied of all treif food and washed out until it is perfectly clean. However, according to the principle just mentioned, "As it was absorbed, that's how it comes out," the same way cooking caused the walls of the pot to absorb

the treif food particles, then cooking should also cause the walls of the pot to "spit out" those very same particles as well, leaving the pot kosher once again.

Obviously the laws of kashrus are a little more complicated than this, which is why one ought to consult their local orthodox rabbi when a question of kashrus comes up. However, for the sake of our discussion of exile and redemption, we have already revealed enough. For, we can look at the food particles absorbed into the walls of the pot as being in "exile," and the process of kashering and releasing them as one of "redemption."

The main thing to remember is that, though, in the medical world, heat usually is a helper (to sterilize and heal), in the World of Kosher, heat is the culprit. In fact, if **COLD** treif food finds its way into a **COLD** kosher pot, after the food is removed the pot need merely to be thoroughly cleansed with **COLD** water. Voila! It is ready for (kosher) use once again!

How true this of exile and redemption ...

In the world of literature, and certainly in the eyes of Torah, heat is a symbol of desire and passion. When one's yetzer hara (Evil Inclination) becomes "heated up" it is amazing how deeply one can become entrenched in wrongdoing-it is amazing how truth becomes a forgotten concept, and how the fulfillment of desire becomes life's priority.

Not only this, but, it is desire, **WHAT** one desires, and **HOW BADLY** he or she desires it that determines how deeply exile is going to affect him or her. It is the intensity of the "heat" of desire that determines how deeply "absorbed" Jews become in the "walls" of their "melting pot," only increasing the amount of "heat" necessary to redeem such people from deep within the recesses of those "walls."

What this means is, just as exile affects all Jews differently, so too will the final redemption. Those who have become so absorbed in their host culture to the point that they are almost completely lost, G-d forbid, will require a more extensive and, perhaps, "hotter" redemption process. On the other hand, those who have allowed themselves to be affected only a little by the host society around them will require very little to free them spiritually and physically when the time for redemption comes.

We can see the effects of desire on the minds of men, and as a cause of exile from the returning army in this week's parsha, and the petition of the tribes of Reuvain, Gad, and Menashe to remain on the east side of the Jordan River after Canaan is conquered by the Jewish people.

Why had the Jewish people been commanded to assemble an army and to obliterate the Midyanites in the first place? Because Midyan had sent their daughters in to cause the Jewish people to spiritually stumble. Hence, the main enemy within the enemy had been the Midyanite women themselves. Yet, when the Jewish army had conquered Midyan, they decided to keep these women alive, and to bring them back as spoils of war. Makes sense, right?

So illogical and desire-based was their decision that, when Moshe went out to greet the victorious army and SAW the Midyanite women in tow, he became so exasperated and angry that the Divine Presence left him. As a result, the laws of kashrus had to be taught to the nation by Elazar the Kohen Gadol instead (indicative that the Jewish people had lost the merit to hear these laws from Moshe himself).

And as if that had not been bad enough, later, the tribes of Reuvain, Gad, and Menashe approached Moshe and requested that they be permitted to **NOT** enter Eretz Yisroel, and instead inhabit the conquered Trans-Jordan area. To Moshe, their request smacked of the rejection of Eretz Yisroel over thirty-eight years ago, which led to the extra decades in the desert.

What had their request been based upon? The Torah tells us: sheep; cattle; property. These tribes had become so wealthy that they had doubted Eretz Yisroel's ability to supply them with all their livestock's needs. When Moshe responded with shock and anger, they promised to at least fight the war against the kings of Canaan, and only return to their land **OUTSIDE** Eretz Yisroel once the division of land **INSIDE** Eretz Yisroel could begin. Moshe was told (by G-d Himself) to accept this offer but the midrash makes it perfectly clear that **THIS** marked the beginning of the first exile; it was these tribes who were the first to be attacked and exiled by the Assyrian Empire centuries later.

So confused were these two-and-a-half tribes that, once they agreed to fight elbow-to-elbow with their brothers to possess their G-d-given land, they told Moshe that they would join their brothers after building pens for their animals and homes for their wives and children.

"Ah, excuse me," Moshe corrected them. "Did I hear you correctly? That was first build homes for your families, and shelters for your animals, right?"

"Ah ... right ... Moshe. Homes for the wives and children first, and **THEN** pens for the animals," the tribes of Reuvain, Gad, and Menashe corrected themselves.

What had been the source of all this confusion? Desire. Where did this desire come from? As we mentioned earlier, Midyan in Kabbalah represented the trait of tiva, or, desire. Bilaam had "infected" the Jewish people with tiva, and it had spread like wildfire to the rest of the tribes. (We're still reeling from its effects!)

But the awesome day will come, the prophet has warned us, when G-d will come to "kasher" the Jewish people, and, "as it was absorbed, that's how it will come out"! And, just how the Temple was taken through fire, so too will it return through fire! the Talmud advises us. Just how hot that fire will be for each and every one of us will be based upon just how deeply we have been absorbed in this last, long, and deep exile.

Parshas Massey

Seudah Shlishis:

This parsha is the end of the fourth book, BaMidbar. It also contains within it a summary of the entire forty-years in the desert, including all the locations the Jewish people camped at, **FORTY-TWO** in all. At first thought the number forty-two may not be significant, but the Pri Tzaddik is quick to point out that forty-two is the number of letters found in the special and holy Name of G-d that prophets used to pronounce and meditate on when going into a state of prophecy. Therefore, the Pri Tzaddik teaches, these forty-two stops correspond to this forty-two letter Name.

However, what is the significance of this correspondence?

We know that each camp the Jewish people established throughout their forty years in the desert was not merely a place to become rejuvenated; they were places to become reJEWvenated. In other words, each journey represented a new path to an even higher level of spiritual growth and connection to Torah, and each camp was the time and place to integrate that new level. This way, when it came time to leave, the Jewish people were a new people, or, rather, the same people on a higher level. This was a process of growth that was to continue until the Jewish people simultaneously reached perfection and the Land of Israel.

This, the Pri Tzaddik points out, is also an analogy for life. Everyone has forty-two "stops" to make on his way to personal spiritual completion, for which he was put here on the earth. What that forty-secondth level will look like for each person will be different, but it means the same thing for all of us: spiritual completion.

Thus, whenever the concept of "forty-two" comes up, it usually alludes to an opportunity to become more spiritually elevated. This is why the prayer "Ana b'koach ..." ("Please with the strength ...") is found in all siddurim before Pesukei D'Zimrei (Introductory Psalms), and Lecha Dodi erev Shabbos, at times that we are ripe for spiritual elevation. And, as the Kabbalists point out, Ana b'koach is made up of seven stanzas each with six words, whose forty-two letter acrostic alludes to G-d's forty-two letter Name.

Obviously there is a lot more to say about this, but suffice it to say that this is another example of how even the simple, technical details of the Torah allude to deep meanings and holy insights.

Melave Malkah:

The Talmud asks the question at the end of Masechta Ta'anis: Why is the fifteenth day of Av (Tu

B'Av) such a happy day? One of the principle answers given is that it was the day, during the time of the Judges, that the ban against intermarriage among tribes (found at the end of this week's parsha) was finally lifted.

Historically, it was the lifting of this ban that saved the tribe of Binyomin from extinction. After the horrific civil war between Binyomin and the rest of the nation, their ranks had been decimated, and only inter-tribal marriage could reverse the trend for them.

But how could they override the Torah which prevented such marriages. The Talmud answers that that mitzvah had been relevant only at the time of the division of the land, to assure that each tribe retained its portion of the inheritance. Once that was no longer an issue, the injunction against inter-tribe marriage was, in a sense, automatically lifted.

However, though the lifting of the ban saved one of the twelve tribes, the truth is, exile has caused the loss of another ten-and-a-half tribes, for whose return we still wait. There is an opinion that states that these tribes will never really return, but that an element of each of them resides among the remaining surviving tribes. However, the prevalent opinion is that one of the Moshiach's role will be to return the "Lost Tribes," and to reunite the entire nation as part of the completion of the ingathering of the exiles.

As Tisha B'Av roles around again, and we trudge forward through the darkness of this last exile, we do so knowing that with the year 5758 coming up, G-d willing, the time for such a reunion may not be as far off as we think.

Have a great Shabbos, and **CHAZAK!**
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