

EREV RAV: RETURN TO SENDER

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

After Paroah sent the people (ha-umm) away... (Shemos 13:17)

At first glance, the above verse is talking about the Jewish people. But, as the Ohr HaChaim points out, when the Torah refers to "the people," it means the "Mixed Multitude"--the Erev Rav-- that left with the Jewish people.

Who was the Erev Rav? According to the Ohr HaChaim, they were spies sent along by Paroah to sow seeds of dissension among the ranks of Jews. They were the rabble-rousers, and, though, they may not have been successful at making the Jewish people return to Egypt (which, they came close to doing), they were the cause of Moshe's failure to enter Eretz Yisroel, and the delaying of the Final Redemption. To make a long, painful story short, they represent one of the biggest stumbling blocks in the path of the Jewish nation.

That's right, "represent"--present tense.

This is because the Erev Rav did not die off in the desert, at least not spiritually. "Erev Rav" is a concept, and is a title that can be given to any Jew that tries to dissuade other Jews from belief in Sinaitic Torah, and the Final Redemption. That's what the Erev Rav did in the desert, and that is what the Erev Rav has done in every generation.

The Jewish people have had many enemies from within-- we are a nation with as many splinter groups over the millennia as there have been peoples. (Well, at least it seems that way.) However, what makes the Erev Rav stand out is their motto:

"These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of Egypt!" (Shemos 32:4)

Right, and the next thing you'll want me to do is buy some swamp land in Florida!

Who did the Erev Rav expect to convince with that lie? The answer: Anyone looking for a way out of Torah and mitzvos. When a person wants to turn his back on Torah, all he has to do is call the Erev Rav. It is the Erev Rav that will provide the means and justification--in the name of truth. They'll create whole new branches of Judaism, and then claim that theirs is the true way to serve the Jewish G-d. That's what the Erev Rav of the Jewish people have always done.

For, it is one thing to become secular and leave behind Torah-Judaism (especially out of ignorance). However, it is another thing altogether to turn against Torah and those who uphold Torah, and literally go to war against them. That's what the Erev Rav was sent by Paroah to accomplish, and that's what they declared to do when they entered the religious arena and challenged the Torah's notion of service of G-d.

This is why the verse says that Paroah sent them, and not G-d, as it should have. After all, it was G-d who coerced Paroah into sending out the Jewish people through the Ten Plagues. However, it was not G-d who sent out the Erev Rav--that was Paroah's doing, the posuk is telling us.

The only question is, does the Erev Rav know that they are indeed the Erev Rav of that generation? Probably not--they usually become that way as a result of faulty education, poor decisions, and often, a desire to adapt to the host culture more than the Torah permits.

However, we have to be aware of their presence and the potential damage they can cause in every generation. After all, they are Jewish; they are one of us. But, we part roads with that part of the Jewish people the moment they "attack" Torah Judaism and its adherents, no matter in what name they declare their war.

Shabbos Day:

Moshe took the bones of Yosef with him ... (Shemos 13:19)

Before Yosef died at the end of Parashas Vayechi, and the Egyptian oppression was about to begin, he promised his descendants and family that redemption would come, and that eventually G-d would bring them back to Eretz Yisroel. He, however, would die and be buried in Egypt, and therefore, before he died, he made those surviving him to take an oath that when the time finally came, they would recover his remains and bring them for re-burial in Eretz Yisroel, in Shechem.

When the time finally came some 139 years later, it was Moshe who was busy fulfilling the oath. With the help of a miracle, Moshe was able to surface the remains of Yosef from the bottom of the Nile river, and transport them out of Egypt.

On the verse quoted about, the Zohar, as to be expected, says something obscure:

The exile in Egypt was because of Yosef, who is called "shor" (ox), and he fell among the Egyptians, who called "chamor" (donkey), and it says, "Do not plow with an ox and donkey together ..." (Devarim 22:10), until Moshe came and took his bones with him and removed the ox from among the donkeys ... (Zohar, Vayishlach 394)

We know from the Torah that Yosef was the "cause" of exile, because of the hatred and jealousy he seemed to trigger among his brothers. But what does the exile have to do with a mitzvah of not

plowing with an ox and donkey together?

According to the Zohar, the ox and the donkey symbolize to opposing spiritual forces in creation-- the ox symbolizes the side of holiness (being kosher), and the donkey symbolizes the side of spiritual impurity (being treif). This is why they can't "plow" together, because the side of impurity always wants to do away with the side of holiness, especially when in such close proximity of the ox.

When Shimon, whose "mazel" is the ox, went in and killed Shechem son of Chamor (donkey), he aroused the side of spiritual impurity against the family of Ya'akov. In the end, Ya'akov was able to ward off the side of impurity--that is, until Yosef the "ox" was sent down to Egypt, among the "donkey"--courtesy of his own brothers.

In the end, the forces of purity won, with the help of G-d, and because Moshe possessed the ability to rise above them. And by retrieving the bones of Yosef, Moshe opened the door to redemption from the abyss of Egyptian impurity, while the rest of the Jewish nation, oblivious to what Moshe was doing, was busy collecting gold and silver.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Moshe stretched out his hand over the sea; G-d caused the sea to go back with a powerful east wind all that night, dividing the waters and making the sea dry land. The Children of Israel walked into the midst of the sea upon dry ground, with walls of waters on their right and left sides. (Shemos 14:21-22)

It is very easy to get caught up in the drama of the miracle of the Sea Splitting and the spectacular redemption that followed that we may overlook subtle but important questions along the way. Not so when it comes to great rabbis such as the Vilna Gaon (Gra), who asks the following questions:

1. Why does it first say, "The Children of Israel walked within the Sea on dry land" (14:22) only to later switch the order of the words and say, "They walked on dry land within the Sea" (14:29)?
2. Why does it mention that the water was a wall for them twice?
3. Why is it that the second time the word "wall" is written, it is written defective, that is, without a "vav" (ches, mem, heh as opposed to ches, vav, mem, heh), which can also spell the Hebrew word for "anger"? (Kol Eliyahu, Beshallah, 57)

The Gra answers all these questions by saying that the Torah is alluding to the fact that there were two groups of Jews at the Sea. The first group was of those Jews who completely trusted in G-d and His Providence, and who were willing to follow Him anywhere without question. As the Midrash says, Nachshon ben Aminadav and his entire tribe jumped into the Sea before it even split, without complete confidence in G-d. It is to this group that the verse refers when it writes,

"The Children of Israel walked within the Sea on dry land" (14:22)

--because they entered the Sea before it even split!

The second group of Jews had less faith in G-d (being affected by the Erev Rav), and were hesitant to go anywhere without first seeing a safe route. Hence, they only entered the Sea after they saw it split and dry land appeared. It is to this less-trusting group that the second verse alludes:

"They walked on dry land within the Sea" (14:29)?

This is also why the word for "wall" was written the second time without the "vav," so that the word could also indicate Divine displeasure with this show of lack of faith. After all, G-d did do incredible miracles to bring them this far--they should have trusted G-d would also save them from the Egyptians at the Sea as well.

Melave Malkah:

"Your right hand, O Eternal, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O Eternal, has crushed the enemy (tir-atz oiyeve)!" (Shemos 15:6)

After the Jewish people successfully and miraculously crossed the Red Sea and saw the Egyptians drown within it, they gave tremendous praise to G-d. That praise has been called the "Shir shel Yumm," the "Song of the Sea," and it is recited each morning in the "Introductory Psalms" of the morning prayer service.

Of the many verses found therein, one reads as follows:

"Your right hand, O Eternal, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O Eternal, has crushed the enemy (tir-atz oiyeve)!" (Shemos 15:6)

The Arizal finds an amazing allusion in this verse to another story, the Book of Iyov (Job): if you rearrange the letters of the words "tir-atz oiyeve," (tav, raish, ayin, tzaddik ... aleph, vav, yud, tzaddik) they can spell the words "tzara'as Iyov" (tzaddik, raish, ayin, tav ... aleph, yud, vav, bais).

Nu? you will ask.

Well, one of the classic questions of all time is, "What happened to Iyov (Job), and why?" He seemed like a nice enough guy, minding his own business and appreciating what he had in life. Why did G-d have to take the Satan up on his dare, and leave him to the devices of this negative angel? Is this not a classic case of bad things happening to good people?

Well, not exactly.

There is a famous midrash that Paroah had three advisors to help him decide how to deal with the Jewish people: Bilaam, Yisro, and, believe it or not, Iyov (Sefer HaYashar). The evil Bilaam (as we see

later on in Parashas Balak), was a prototypical anti-Semite. There was nothing we could have done to make Bilaam like us--he could not be happy until the last Jews was eradicated from the face of the earth and the annals of history. Therefore, his advice to Paroah had been to do away with the Jewish people the fastest, most efficient way possible.

Yisro was not only not an anti-Semite, but he was a wise man as well. He warned Paroah to leave the Jews alone, or risk losing his own throne trying to exterminate them. He told Paroah that those who have tried in the past to wrestle with the seed of Avraham have ended up on the bottom, which in Paroah's case, would mean the bottom of the Red Sea!

Hence, it was a stand-off between Bilaam and Yisro. Paroah needed a deciding vote. All eyes turned to Iyov, to either throw his lot in with Bilaam and his "Final Solution," or with Yisro, and his plan of redemption for the Jewish people. What was Iyov to decide?

Apparently Iyov preferred to sit on the fence, and abstain from voting, living by the maxim, "When in doubt, do without" ... and get out! Iyov went home, Yisro fled for his life, and Bilaam watched with delight as Paroah pursued his course of action.

Of course, in a world of Divine judgment, there comes a time when one must "pay the piper." For all his evil, Bilaam received his just desserts when he was later killed by the Jewish people during their attack of Midian (Parashas Mattos). Yisro, not too long after, merited to become the father-in-law of the great Moshe Rabbeinu, and to have a parshah in the Torah named after him--the one in which Torah is given!

What about Iyov--what happened to him?

Well, for not being the vehicle for redemption of the Jewish people while in Egypt, when he had the chance to be, he later became the vehicle for their redemption by the Red Sea.

To make a long story short, the Midrash points out that the miracle at the Red Sea almost didn't happen. While the Egyptians remained poised to pounce, the terrified Jewish people stood by the sea and waited for instructions. What was the hold up? According to the Midrash, there was a judgment taking place, to evaluate whether or not the Jewish people indeed deserved to be saved from the swords of the hot-on-the-pursuit Egyptian army.

"But these [the Egyptians] ones worshipped idols, and these ones [the Jewish people] worshipped idols," the Prosecuting Angel complained to G-d. So why save these ones, and drown the others, the Angel complained. And he had a point, too.

However, Bris Avos is Bris Avos, and in spite of the fact that their lives in Egypt didn't justify the size of miracle necessary to save the Jewish people from the Egyptians on one side, and drowning on the other side, Bris Avos did. G-d had promised Avraham that his descendants would go free from Egyptian bondage, and no conditions had been attached to that promise. Four-hundred-and-thirty years later, G-d was making good on that promise.

Therefore, G-d "needed" to distract the Prosecuting Angel away from the Jewish People at the Red Sea, in order to remove the judgment just long enough to sneak the Jewish people across the sea.

And that is precisely where the Story of Iyov begins, measure-for-measure.

For those interested in the custom of leaving bread for birds Erev Shabbos Beshallah, two reasons are cited:

1. In the desert, there were those who wanted to prove Moshe a liar. So, when Moshe had told the Jews to collect a double portion of manna on Erev Shabbos, because they wouldn't find manna in the desert on Shabbos itself, they left some over to give the impression that it had indeed fallen Shabbos. However, the birds beat them to it, and the next day, on Shabbos, the manna wasn't anywhere to be found, as Moshe had warned them.
2. The birds daily chirping is like shira (song) to G-d, praising Him, so we recall this in the parshah that our Shira occurs in as well.

So, don't only put out the bread for the birds, but sing praises of G-d while you do it.

Have a great Shabbos, and don't forget to feed the birds this week (before Shabbos, of course)--it's a tradition.

Pinchas Winston
