

COMING OR GOING?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d said to Moshe, "Go to Paroah. I have allowed him to be stubborn, as well as his servants, in order to perform My signs among them, so you can relate it to your son, and your son's son, how I mocked Egypt, and about the signs I performed among them, so you will know that I am G-d." (Shemos 10:1-2)

Someone e-mailed me a rather lengthy newsletter this week that I can't help but relate to this week's parshah, because of the Talmudic discussion it reminds me of. The newsletter is about the impending international crisis coming up quickly, referred to as "Y2K."

No, this is not the name of a new bug spray. It is the name given to the millennium that might need a bug spray of a different type, for, Y2K is an abbreviation of, "Year 2,000." The year 2000 is, according to many, the year that countless mainframe computers of the most important institutions around the world shut down, leaving panic, chaos, and pandemonium in their stead.

Which Talmudic story am I reminded of? The story is this one:

... On his return, Vespasian dispatched Titus the Wicked, who when he reached Jerusalem said, "Where is their G-d, the Rock in Whom they trusted?" (Devarim 32:37) ... What did he do ...? He took the sacred vessels of the Sanctuary, wrapped them in the veil that was hanging in the Holy Place to sail with it to his capital and rejoice over his success ... At sea a storm arose and threatened to sink the ship, upon which Titus remarked, "It seems that their G-d has no power anywhere else but at sea. Paroah he drowned; Sisera he drowned, and now He plans to drown me too. If He is so mighty, let Him come ashore and fight me there!"

A voice came down from Heaven and said, "Wicked man, son of a wicked man, grandson of Eisav the wicked! Go ashore, for I have an insignificant creature in My world that is called a gnat ... Go and fight with it!" Immediately after he landed, a gnat flew up his nostrils and gnawed at his brain for seven years ... Upon opening his brain [after he died], they found a gnat as big as a swallow. (Gittin 56b)

Why does Y2K remind me of this story? Because, in the newsletter I read, it says:

"Big Brother is no more powerful than his software. On January 1, 2000, this strength may fall to zero.

Actually, double zero."

To think that mankind, which has grown so powerful and advanced over the generations, so self-sufficient that there is no longer any pressing need to serve G-d, that many feel compelled to ask, "Who is G-d?"--could be subdued by, well, nothing.

Actually, double nothing.

It's like a modern-day gnat, a "bug" in the system, so-to-speak, banging away in our heads everyday, getting louder as the year 2,000 rolls around. Could it be that we are going to be victims of our own success, that our dependence upon technology to run our lives will be the very thing to stop our lives dead in its tracks?

And we won't talk about all the predictions and prophecies made hundreds of years ago, concerning the Jewish year 5760, which happens to coincide with the year, you got it--2,000. How the father of the Chidah said that 5760 will be the last year of history as we know it.

Hmmmmmm. I wonder what THAT is supposed to mean? We may find out sooner than later because, the beautiful thing about technology is that it makes things happen so quickly. The scary thing about technology is that it makes things happen so quickly.

Like Moshiach's coming? Perhaps. But it wouldn't hurt to go stringent in this case, and make the most out of every day of life, in a Torah-way. Remember that shiur you wanted start attending? Start now. Remember that chavrusa you wanted to find? Find him now. You remember that sefer you wanted to read? Read it now. Remember that tzeddakah you wanted to give? Give it now.

I'm not trying to sound like the voice of doom (too late, right?), but let's not look at the world with a Paroah-mentality, because, as the parshah says:

I have allowed him to be stubborn ... in order to perform My signs among them ... so you will know that I am G-d."

Shabbos Day:

G-d said to Moshe, "Stretch out your hand towards Heaven, so that darkness will come over Egypt, a darkness which can be felt (vayamaish)." (Shemos 10:21)

What is a "darkness which can be felt"?

Why do we ask such a question? Because to us, darkness is merely that absence of light, the result, for example, of when the sun leaves our part of the world for another. However, the truth is that it is not so simple, as the Vilna Gaon (Gra) indicates:

"There are some who say that light is an independent creation, and that darkness is an independent creation, not like those who say that darkness is just an absence of light. In truth, it is not like this, but rather, darkness is in fact an independent creation that is pushed away by light, and that's the way The Holy One, Blessed is He, made nature. Therefore, here (in this plague), G-d changed nature, because it says, 'a darkness which can be felt,' which means that the darkness 'pushed' away the light, and not the light, the darkness (the root of the word 'vayamaish' is from 'and he [Yehoshua] didn't move (yamish) from his tent (Shemos 33:11)'." (Kol Eliyahu, Bo 53)

In other words, says the Gra, the posuk means "a darkness that can move light."

A sefer called HaK'sav v'HaKabbalah on Parashas Bereishis also quotes the Gra saying that darkness is in fact an independent creation. However, the Radak seems to hold that darkness is the result of an absence of light.

The Talmud, which treats darkness as an "object," seems to provide support for the Gra's opinion:

... This is what it means to say: G-d called to the light and commanded it in the mitzvos of the day, and G-d called to the darkness and commanded it in the mitzvos of the night ... (Pesachim 2a)

As well, the Talmud states that:

... We must mention the "trait" of night during the day blessings, and the "trait" of day during the evening blessings, to counter the heretics who claim that He who made the day did not also make the night. (Brochos 11b)

If darkness is only the absence of light, then how could the heretics think such a thing? We would only be dealing with one creation, the creation of light, and the lack of its presence. (Nevertheless, the Bach on the Tur considers darkness to only be an absence of light, though there are so many proofs to support the Gra.)

What makes this discussion so chilling is what happens to the letters of "vayamaish," when you consider the letter preceding each: you arrive at the letters heh, tes, lamed, raish. Without vowels, you may have difficulty recognizing the significance of these letters, but with the proper vowels, the letters form the word: Hitler. Inserting this word into the posuk yields a hidden meaning: Hitler is darkness.

Well, that is for sure. However, what is uncanny is the way that the only plague to affect the Jewish population, during which 12,000,000 million Jews died, has a allusion to one of the vilest anti-Semites to ever live.

Draw your OWN conclusions.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Moshe called for all the elders of Israel, and told them, "Set aside a lamb for your families, and slaughter the Pesach. Take a bunch of hyssop branches, and dip it in the blood in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two side posts with the blood." (Shemos 12:21-22)

We take the mezuzos on our door frames for granted, so much so that over the years many have resorted to putting one on their front doors only, against the halachah. Many today may not know that every door frame of a living space requires a mezuzah, but at some point, the first people to use only one knew the halachah--and changed it.

It would seem that they under-estimated the power of the mezuzah, because they under-estimated the ability of the blood that was put on the door posts in this week's parshah:

Rav Chona in the name of Rebi Yermiyah: It writes regarding it [the blood on the lintel and posts] "atonement like holy sacrifices," like one who has an altar. Likewise, it was taught: There were three altars for our ancestors in Egypt--a lintel and two door posts ... (Talmud Yerushalmi 65b)

Hence, the Talmud compares the blood on the lintel and door posts to blood that is put on the altar, which has the power to atone for the sins of the Jewish people. Sprinkling the blood of the sacrifices on the altar was one of the most important part of the Temple service.

By extension, since the mezuzah on our door post is a throwback to the blood on our ancestors' door posts, it is logical to assume that our mezuzos on have a similar ability to atone for our mistakes. Perhaps, every time we walk by a mezuzah and give it a kiss, we cause an atonement for our spiritual shortcomings, and cause Heaven to shine blessing down upon us.

Melave Malkah:

"When your son asks you in the future, 'What is this about?' tell him, 'Through force G-d brought us out from Egypt, from the house of slavery. There was a time when Paroah would not let us go, and G-d slew all the first-born in Egypt, both the first-born of man and the first-born of animals ...' " (Shemos 13:14-15)

The following may not constitute a d'var Torah, but it is a vort, one that ties in very nicely with the emphasis on the Pesach-Experience being a parent-child experience.

The parshah begins with the words, "bo el Paroah ..." -Come to Paroah. As the Ba'al HaTurim points out, elsewhere the word for "Go" to Paroah is "lech," which would be the proper word. Therefore, he says the usage of "bo" indicates when Moshe was sent to Paroah in his house, as opposed to the usage of "lech," which means meet him outside of his house, like by the Nile river, for example.

However, perhaps there is another big message in this tiny little word.

The word "bo" is spelled, bais-aleph, which is the opposite of aleph-bais, which happens to spell "av,"

or father. In fact, the aleph can allude to av (father), while the bais can be said to refer to "ben," or son. Hence, from the start of the Aleph-Bais, with which G-d made all of existence, there is an allusion to the essential and correct relationship: father-to-son (or mother-to-daughter).

If you think of it, the concept of rebellion is a reversal of a relationship in which authority is usurped, like a son who tries to play the role of the father and treat his parent like a child. We usually refer to this as "chutzpah." The concept of sin is similar, in that we, the children, play G-d by taking our own lives and actions completely into our own hands and do what we want to do it, when we want to do it. We usurp G-d's authority.

That was Paroah. Paroah reversed the father-son relationship and treated G-d as if He was subservient to Paroah's will. This is why G-d visited destruction upon him with the word "bo," measure-for-measure for reversing the "av-ben" relationship.

Thus, we tell our children at the Seder Table, "Do not act like Paroah and put the 'cart before the horse.' Always respect authority, especially those, whom according to Torah, are to be over you. When it is time to be a "parent," be the parent. But when it is time to be the "child," be the child and don't reverse the order."

This is, perhaps, why the Talmud says:

The Four Cups [at the Seder] correspond to the four cups of Paroah ... (Talmud Yerushalmi, Pesachim 68b)

With respect to Paroah, his cups of wine symbolized his kingship, and the four cups at the Seder also correspond to the four sons mentioned in the Haggadah. This is all part of the Haggadah's way of transmitting the message of freedom from Egypt and the Paroah-mentality to all the generations of Jews that would eventually follow throughout the millennium--the freedom that comes from assuming the role at any given moment in time that is meant to be ours.

Have a great Shabbos,

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