

PLENTY OF REDEEMING VALUES

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Perceptions On The Parsha

Friday Night:

Not only with you do I make this covenant and this curse; but with the those who are not here today before Hashem, our G-d, as well as those here today. (Devarim 29:13-14)

On this verse, the Zohar has the following comment:

The Holy One, Blessed is He, literally showed Adam every generation and its scholars, according to the souls that would later come; all of them stood before The Holy One, Blessed is He as they would later appear in This World. Also, at Mt. Sinai [with respect to the words] "who are not here," it means that all those souls yet to be created were there at Mt. Sinai as they would eventually come to exist. But, why does it say "who are not here" if they were, in fact, there? It could be that they were "there," but not with them, meaning that they could not see them. But why could they not see them, as Adam did? Because they saw on a higher level than this, as it says, "face to face G-d spoke with you" (Devarim 5:4) ... (Zohar, Lech-Lecha 246)

This is an interesting concept, with interesting implications. If you are Jewish today, and you can trace your Jewish roots quite far back in history, then, you too, at least in soul, were at Mt. Sinai. You may feel like you are here for the first time, but the above verse indicates otherwise, or, at least that only your present body is. Even converts to Judaism may possess a "Jewish soul" that can trace its spiritual roots back to Mt. Sinai!

This is the concept of "gilgulim," which people either love or hate. The word itself comes from the Hebrew word for "wheel," indicating the "rolling over" of the soul from lifetime to lifetime. Yes--Torah Judaism believes in reincarnation, in a big way ... to the extent the that holy Arizal has an entire book dedicated to this topic called, "Sha'ar HaGilgulim"--Gate of Reincarnations.

It would not be appropriate to go into much detail regarding the contents of this seminal work in this parshah sheet. But, suffice it to say that it changes one's entire perspective on life in this world, and the way we view ourselves in the context of Jewish and world history.

It seems that, for the most part, people see life as being random, with "winners" and "losers," and perhaps a lot of mediocre people in-between. What has passed has passed, and what is about to come, who knows? "Life is for living and enjoying what you can while you can," many believe, and beyond that, what meaning is there?

From the Arizal, it is clear that life in every generation is another act in well-structured "play" that will include the Final Redemption. One person's strength is another person's weakness, and everyone has their tests, and this is not random. Every person is here for a certain reason, to achieve personal rectification, and that means confronting weakness, and not excusing it.

It also means that you can't take yourself, the people in your life, and your station in life for granted. Even though your life is the product of free-will choices, still, it is a function of concepts and realities we barely know anything about, but which affect us daily. Don't be fooled by what you can't see; there is a very elaborate, elegant spiritual reality around you, in you, and it makes living in this world far more dramatic when you consider its implications--personally, and nationally.

Shabbos Day:

If you recall from Parashas Ki Saitzai, we ended off the Seudos Shlishis d'var Torah with the following:

"Moving ahead in time, we arrive at the eighth parshah, Nitzavim-Vayailech, which we read this year on the Shabbos right before Rosh Hashanah 5760. Nitzavim-Vayailech, therefore, corresponds to the period from 5700 to 5800, or, from 1940 to 2040 CE. What does this parshah speak about, and what does it speak to us? If you sneak a peak at these parshios, you will have little difficulty making connections between the parshios and our times ..."

Parashas Nitzavim begins with a mood of Final Redemption, moving from a discussion of Divine wrath and punishment for Jewish disobedience, and the wonderment that will result from the extent of this wrath, to talk of a renewed covenant with G-d, national repentance, and the final ingathering of the exiles from the four corners of the earth. We have seen all aspects of this, if only in part, in our day.

This parshah ends with encouraging words of the availability of Torah (certainly enhanced by the Internet today), which also acts as a warning for those who would try to make Torah appear a "closed book" and inaccessible. We are reminded, at the end, that to forsake Torah is to forsake free-will, the purpose of life in This World in the first place.

Parashas Vayailech begins the final phase of the transference of leadership from Moshe to Yehoshua, and therefore, it is also the beginning of the entry into Eretz Yisroel. It is also at this time

that Moshe Rabbeinu finished writing the Torah for the nation, and all the generations to come, and left us all with this final warning:

"I know that after I die you will become corrupt and turn away from the path that I have told you to follow. In the end of days you will be beset with evil, since you will have done evil in G-d's eyes, angering Him with the work of your hands." (Devarim 31:29)

--and the song to follow in Parashas HaAzinu.

However, just as the parshios in Sefer Devarim mirror the Sixth Millennium, so, too, do the verses of the entire Torah echo history since the beginning of man's existence. For example,

Let all your elders and officers gather together before me [Moshe] that I may speak these words in their ears ... (Devarim 31:28)

is the 5,750th verse in the entire Torah (there 5,845 verse in the entire five books), which might not be significant if not for the fact that there is a tradition that each verse corresponds to one year of history (at least until the year 5845). If so, then each verse, potentially, can shed light on its corresponding year.

For example, the 5,698th posuk (from Parashas Ki Savo) reads as follows:

G-d was angered and brought upon you all the curses that are written here. (Devarim 29:26)

It "happens" to be, that, when the Hebrew year "5698" is written out in Hebrew letters (as we are accustomed to do), it spells the Hebrew word, "tirtzach" (tav, reish, tzaddik, ches), which means, "you will murder." For those who do not recognize the year 5698, it corresponded to the Western year, 1938--the year of the infamous "Kristallnacht Pogrom" in Germany, and pretty much the official beginning of Hitler's "Final Solution" to what he saw was the "Jewish problem." The connection to the above verse, many feel, is self-evident.

Going further in the Torah, and therefore in time, we arrive at the 5,750th verse, quoted first above. In the Torah, Moshe is commanding this gathering of the leaders to teach them the "song" (found next in Parashas HaAzinu), created to act as constant reminder and warning to the Jewish people of how to avoid Divine wrath; this is why it begins with an overview of mankind's dismal start.

For this reason, many want to say that the 5,750th verse is one that alludes to potential redemption in the year 5750, and there are other predictions and sources to that effect. Clearly, historically, the year 5750/1990 was a watershed year in Jewish and world history, one in which Jews were finally allowed to emigrate from Russia. The Persian Gulf War also began that year, and ended the following year on Purim, after the Israeli population was "saved" from Iraq's scud missiles quite miraculously. (In "The Big Picture: Thirty-Six Sessions to Intellectual & Spiritual Clarity," I discuss the year 5750 and its significance in more depth.)

We are not finished with this concept yet, and the best is yet to come. But, that will have to wait until

next year--two weeks from now--and Parashas HaAzinu, b'ezras Hashem Yisborach.

Before leaving this idea for now, it is also an interesting occurrence that the two parshios, which are considered one parshah, together have seventy verses. As is pointed out so many places, the gematria of Gog u'Magog, the name of the final war that leads to the Final Redemption, is also 70. Another allusion to redemption?

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

"I know that after I die you will become corrupt and turn away from the path that I have told you to follow ..." (Devarim 31:29)

"But you see that during Yehoshua's time they did not become corrupt! ... We can derive from here that one's student should be as dear to him as his own self, for, to Moshe, as long as Yehoshua lived, it was as if he himself was still living." (Rashi)

In other words, from Moshe's words, it sounds as if the Jewish people would follow a path of corruption immediately after he died, which, historically, had not been the case. However, after Yehoshua's death, the people did begin to stray, and Rashi resolves the discrepancy by turning it into a lesson for educators.

It is a beautiful thought, definitely worth elaborating on. For, Rashi is not just indicating how respectful a teacher must be of his or her students; Rashi is alluding to a process that proves whether or not an true education has indeed taken place!

This is why the Hebrew word for "education" is "chinuch," which comes from the word "l'chaneich," which means "to dedicate." This alone indicates what G-d expects from the teacher, and what the teacher is trying to impart to the student.

From the teacher, we expect dedication, because this is what students notice the most-consciously, and even sub-consciously-and this is what impresses them enough to open their minds and hearts to hear the message. The point of such dedication? To bring students to a level of dedication to truth themselves-the truer the idea, the greater the need for this dedication.

When teachers are dedicated to the truth, not just conceptually, but with all their being, then this comes out in their teaching, as if their souls "spill" out through their words. The truer the idea, the truer this reality; the more profound the concept, the more profound this effect.

This, then, often draws the soul of the student out as well, which is why students often become more attentive with dedicated educators. Then, teaching becomes a matter of soul encountering soul, and through knowledge, souls bind and become one-just as Moshe and Yehoshua had become.

This is why it was quite natural for Moshe to see Yehoshua's life as an extension of his own, and why he could feel such profound love for someone who wasn't even a blood-relative. It is also probably why the Jewish people, under the leadership of Yehoshua, did not stray from Torah, as if Moshe Rabbeinu himself was still leading them, at least on some level.

Melave Malkah:

I myself have anointed My king, upon Tzion My Holy Mountain. I am obligated to proclaim: Hashem said to me, "You are my son; I have given birth to you this day. Ask from me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, and the ends of the earth your possession ..." (Tehillim 2:6-8)

According to the Radak, G-d is chastising the Philistines for trying to remove Dovid HaMelech from power. And according to the Malbim, G-d is telling them that their ruse would backfire on them, instead, causing a strengthening of Dovid's right to the Jewish throne.

The same concept can be applied to the Jewish nation as a whole. When the time comes for redemption, the nations of the world may then intensify their effort to prevent it from occurring, but, in the end, their plans, unwittingly, will be the very trigger that will bring redemption about.

It is very similar to what happened in Egypt, when Pharaoh sought to lessen the Jewish people by killing the children at birth. However, since this was against the will of G-d, it had the reverse effect of leading to multiple births--six children at one time to one mother. It seems that G-d has His own sense of irony.

"... You will smash them with a rod of iron, and shatter them like an earthen vessel."

This will be the final result for all those who stand in the way of history, and G-d's master plan for creation.

The final words of this tehillah are very appropriate for the week before Rosh Hashanah, and the advent of the special Selichos we say in advance:

... Now, kings perceive! judges of the earth submit! Serve G-d in awe, and rejoice with trembling ...

It seems like an oxymoron: rejoice with trembling? But this is in fact how the rabbis describe the Jewish day of judgment, as a day that we prepare ourselves as if we are about to attend a simchah (haircut, Shabbos clothing, fancy food, etc.), while, in fact we are about to be judged for life or death!

Only a people that love truth more than comfort can act this way; only a people who believe in the World-to-Come can make such a celebration of coming face-to-face, so-to-speak, with the Judge of Judges!

... Yearn for purity ...

Yom Kippur is called a "mikvah," for, whereas teshuvah earns us Divine forgiveness and the right to continue, atonement wipes the slate clean, and gives us a fresh start.

... in case G-d becomes angry and your way is destroyed, for in a brief moment, His anger will blaze forth ...

It took 45 seconds, apparently, to do more destruction to Turkey than two atomic bombs did at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and perhaps, cause more deaths in the end as well. Forty-five seconds to undermine a country, more effectively than a year's and four billion dollar's worth of bombing did in Iraq during the Persian Gulf War. Someone pointed out that Turkey is the only Islamic state to outlaw religion.

... Praise for those who trust in Him.

G-d, that is. That is what it is all about in the end, isn't it? Why does a person sin in the first place? What is a sin in the first place?

For the most part, sins are actions we perform, that, according to us, make our lives "better." It may be to satiate a compulsion, to fulfill and urge, or only to satisfy a curiosity-it is still to provide a more comfortable life for us that we obviously feel is due to us (and others whom we care about).

There is a basic counter-principle that goes something like this: If it was for your good, G-d would give it to you. He can-He is G-d-and He would-He is your loving Father in Heaven-if it is for your good, that is, your physical and spiritual good. In that you can trust, and must trust, in order to earn the praise of Heaven, and a favorable judgment on Rosh Hashanah.

Another year has come and gone (if you can believe it!), and once again, I thank all those who have provided me with an opportunity for spreading Torah-those who distribute what I write, and especially those who read what I write. I hope we have all served each other well. Above all, I thank G-d for everything, but particularly for the opportunity of learning and teaching His "Wonder-of-Wonders," and pray that in this merit, others will discover and re-discover their 3,312-year-old heritage. May 5760 be a year of joy for the Jewish people and the nations of the world.

Good Shabbos and L'Shannah Tovah,
Pinchas Winston

L'Shannah Tovah
May this year be filled with much blessing,
And only good news,
For all of the Jewish People.
Nizke Lirot Geulah Shlaimah!

All the best from
The Winston Family

Telzstone
