

# RIPPING AT THE "SEENS"

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

## Friday Night:

*See, I place before you today blessing and curse. The blessing if you listen ...* (Devarim 11:26)

As Moshe continued his farewell dialogue, a short time before his actual death, it must have occurred to the Jewish people what they were losing. As Moshe prepared his beloved people for life after his death, they must have cried, and asked themselves, "How? How could we have sacrificed such a leader, and such a chance for complete redemption?" Moshe's final days must have seemed so surreal.

The Talmud records an interesting dialogue between Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai and Vespasian, before he became Caesar in Rome. It was the time that Vespasian was sent to lay siege to Jerusalem, just before the destruction of the second Temple, and even though the rabbis did not want to resist the Romans, they were forced to by the Jewish rebels within the walls, who had burned the food supply to make the rest of the Jews fight.

In the end, the Talmud relates, Rabban Yochanan Zakkai feigned death to sneak out of the city, and secretly met with Vespasian to mitigate the Roman destruction of the surviving Jews. Their dialogue went like this:

"Peace to you king! Peace to you king!" He [Vespasian] answered him, "You could be killed for two reasons. I am not a king, and yet, you call me king. And, if I am a king, why have you not come to me until now?" "That you say you are not a king, in the future you will be, otherwise Jerusalem would not be given over to you ... And, when you say that if you are a king, why did I not come until now, that is because there are rebellers who would not let us out." He asked him, "But if you have a barrel of honey that is wrapped by a serpent, do you not break the barrel because of the serpent (i.e., destroy the city to eliminate the rebellers)?" He [Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai] was silent. Rebi Yosi, and some say Rebi Akiva, quoted with respect to him the verse, "He turns the wise men backwards, and makes their knowledge foolish." (Yeshayahu 44:25). (Gittin 56b)

... Because, according to the Talmud, there was an answer for Vespasian, and that is: use tongs to remove the serpent and save the barrel. In other words, our strategy was to remove the rebellers, so that the city and its surviving inhabitants could live and not be destroyed in the process. However,

says Rebi Akiva, it seems that there are times that important information is held back from our leaders.

This is a frightening concept, especially for a people that looks to its Torah leaders for guidance and understanding. We would like to believe that if our leaders says something, it needs to be said. Likewise, if our leaders don't say something, it is because it is better not said, and remarkably, that has been the case so many times throughout Jewish history. This is the very basis of the concept "Emunas Chachamim," faith in the wise men.

However, the Talmud seems to indicate that this is not an absolute concept, and doesn't provide parameters as to how to know when the lines of communication between heaven and earth have weakened. Fortunately, the Maharshah does, and it is a very important point to learn and integrate.

Explains the Maharshah: This means, the sin of the people of the city causes The Holy One, Blessed is He, to "turn the wise men backwards" that they don't have the knowledge to answer.

The truth is, this is not a new concept for us, for, Rashi pointed this out earlier on the following posuk: G-d said to Moshe, "Go down, for the people you brought out of Egypt have corrupted themselves ..." (Shemos 32:7)

"Go down ... From your high position, for I have only given you distinction for their sake!" (Rashi, Brochos 32a)

This is why Moshe, two parshios ago, bemoaned:

"G-d denied it to me because of you ..." (Devarim 3:26)

"True," Moshe was telling them, "I was previously denied the right to enter Eretz Yisroel because I hit the rock instead of talking to it (Parashas Chukas). However, my prayers were enough to reverse that decree, and would have, had you been fitting for me to be your leader to enter the land."

And if this was the case with Moshe Rabbeinu, how much more so must this be the case for all Torah leaders since. This is also why prophecy was removed from the Jewish people (3448/313 BCE): if the Jewish people aren't going to listen to their prophets, then what point is there in granting them prophecy?

Perhaps this is why it is called "Emunas Chachamim." A person might think that a Torah leader has to first prove himself by saying wondrous statements that come true before our eyes. He must, in times of trouble, one might assume, be certain of and ready with direction as if he is receiving a direct transmission from G-d.

Perhaps they can, and will. However, first we must create the demand for such Divine assistance by always turning to our Torah leaders, and having faith in their decisions and directives even during peaceful times. When G-d sees our faith in our Torah leaders, then He in turn works through them to

help us.

Furthermore, we must also endeavor to live spiritually pure lives and remain committed to Torah and its essential ideals, as much as we personally can. Then, as we grow greater in Torah and mitzvos, so, too, do our Torah leaders. Then they can act as the important bridge between heaven and ourselves, and provide us with crucial light, during peaceful times, and especially during times of darkness and confusion.

---

## Shabbos Day:

*See, I place before you today blessing and curse ... When Hashem your G-d will bring you into the land which you are there to inherit, you will put the blessing on Har Gerizim and the curse on Har Eival.*  
(Devarim 11:26-29)

This posuk is referring to the blessings and curses detailed later in Parashas Ki Savo. There, six tribes climbed one mountain, and six of them climbed the other mountain while the blessings and curses were spoken out and accepted by the entire nation.

The actual location of Har Gerizim and Har Eival is right by Shechem; in fact Shechem is right between the two of them, which is quite fitting considering that the Talmud says:

Shechem is a place set aside for punishment; the Tribes were "damaged" there; Dinah was violated there, and there the Kingdom of Dovid divided. (Sotah 11a)

As the Talmud points out, bad things happen to good Jews there, and there is a reason for this. In fact, it has to do with something else that happened there, also early in Jewish history:

Rebi Shimon son of Elazar went with Sefer Devarim before Rebi Meir, and they decreed against [the ritual slaughter of] them [Kusim]. For what reason? Rav Nachman son of Yitzchak said: The form of a dove was found amongst them at the top of Har Gerizim, and they worshipped it. (Chullin 6a)

"There is a Midrash that this was the idol that Ya'akov buried under the tree by the mountain Shechem (Bereishis 35:4)." (Tosfos)

It may have been years later that the Kusim, questionable Jews, found this idol and worshipped it, but the connection had not weakened over the millennia. On the contrary, their finding and worshipping this idol was a throwback to the very spiritual darkness that Ya'akov wished to bury then and there.

When? In preparation for Beit El, after Shimon and Levi had wiped out the town of Shechem. And, immediately after he purged his camp of every last vestige of idol worship and spiritual duplicity, the verse says:

They began their journey. The terror of G-d was felt in all the cities around them, and they did not pursue Ya'akov's sons. Ya'akov and all the people with him came to Luz in the land of Canaan, that is, to Beit El. He built an altar there, and he named the place "Beit El's G-d," since that was the place that G-d was revealed to him when he was fleeing from his brother [Eisav] ... G-d appeared to him again and blessed him. G-d said to him, "Your name is Ya'akov. But your name will not only be Ya'akov, but your name will also be Yisroel." (Bereishis 35:5-10)

Unlike Avraham's name change, Ya'akov's was not permanent, for an important reason. Whereas Avraham's name change from "Avram" represented a change in his very being and role within creation, Ya'akov's represented the revelation of a potential, not a fixed reality. It indicated that "Ya'akov" was the twin brother of Eisav; "Yisroel" was, and is not.

In fact, the very name Yisroel itself means:

Your name will no longer be called "Ya'akov," but "Yisroel," [for] you have fought with a divine being and with man, and you have one. (Bereishis 32:29)

--indicating a personal struggle that Ya'akov had to undergo to reach spiritual greatness (see, "Redemption to Redemption," Purim).

Though Ya'akov possesses the potential to follow in the ways of Eisav (who, according to the Midrash, was completely immersed in materialism to the point that he abandoned any longing for, and then belief in, the World-to-Come), he can rise above them. Even while wearing the garb of a Ya'akov, he can still act in the manner of Eisav, his twin brother, sharing his beliefs and even sharing his vision of G-d. But never while wearing the "clothes" of Yisroel.

Perhaps this is why Ya'akov buried the idols at the base of Har Gerizim, the future place of the pronouncement of the blessings by his descendants over a thousand years later. It was a time capsule, of sorts. It was a message plain and simple: The blessings of the Jew come for being a Jew, a Yisroel, that is. It is our job to flee Eisav, not to embrace him and his culture. It is our responsibility to "bury" his false beliefs, not to sustain them and to adopt them.

Perhaps this is the underlying reason for the following:

Rebi Shimon said ... The land of Galil is where Melech Moshiach will be revealed, because it is in the territory of Yosef. It was destroyed first, and it is the place where he will first be revealed from all the places, before spreading to the nations ... as it says, "And the bones of Yosef which they brought up from Egypt for burial in Shechem." (Yehoshua 24:32 ). (Zohar, VaYakhel 220a)

Because, when you think about it, all that Moshiach boils down to, in the end, is helping Ya'akov leave behind all connections to Eisav once and for all, so that he can finally take his right place in history as Yisroel. Obliteration of evil, identified only with the Days of Moshiach is synonymous with the cleansing of all traces of Eisav within the heart of every Jew. It is also what the Talmud refers to as the "slaughtering of the yetzer hara" in Moshiach's day (Succah 52a).

Then, when this finally happens, there will be no curses, only blessings to be enjoyed forever. Then, Shechem will no longer be a place set aside for punishment, but as a place for reward. However, not for Ya'akov the twin brother of Eisav, but for Yisroel, and it will be a well-deserved reward for every Jew who will have "fought with a divine being and with man" and will have won.

---

## SEUDAH SHLISHI:

*When you cross the Jordan, and live in the land which Hashem your G-d is giving you to inherit, and when He gives you rest from all your enemies around you so that you live safely; then you shall bring to the place which Hashem your G-d will choose to establish His name ... (Devarim 12:10-11)*

This verse found fulfillment later on in history during the time of King David ...

"Then build the 'Chosen House' for yourselves in Jerusalem, as it says of Dovid (II Shmuel 7:1-2), 'And it came to pass when the king sat in his house, and G-d had given him respite from his enemies all around, that the king said to Noson the prophet, "See, I dwell in the house of cedar, but the ark of G-d dwells within curtains ..." ' (Rashi)

... Even though the actual Temple was not built unto Shlomo HaMelech's time, in the year 2928 from creation.

The question is, why would building the Temple be based upon first achieving peace? Other nations specifically build Temples during war times so that they can pray to their gods and worship them to gain support in their battles. When it comes to the Jewish concept of a Temple, it seems to be just the opposite.

The answer lies in the role the Temple played in the life of the Jewish people, and the world in general, and the role the average temple plays in the lives of the nations. The Talmud says:

Woe to the nations of the world who destroyed the Temple, and do not know what they destroyed! When the Temple stood, it atoned for them, but what will atone for them now? (Succah 55b)

Most temples work on behalf of the people who built them, whereas the Jewish Temple worked on behalf of the entire world. Most temple buildings are built to create an environment to be contained within its walls. The Jewish Temple was built with windows that were narrow on the inside and wide on the outside, to symbolize the role of the Temple to emanate light out to the rest of the world!

In other words, the Jewish Temple was one of peace, which is why metal, a choice material of weapons of war, was not used to construct the altar. Using the symbol of death to create a symbol of life was contradictory, and contrary to the whole concept of a Bais HaMikdosh--a house of holiness for G-d, whose names include that of "Shalom."

Therefore, the Temple could only be built during times of peace, for, it was peace itself that the

Jewish Temple symbolized, and it was peace that the Temple brought between man and G-d, and between man and man as well.

---

## Melave Malkah:

*But his desire is in the Torah of G-d, and in His Torah he meditates day and night ...* (Tehillim 1:2)

As the Metzudas Dovid points out, not only does the praiseworthy man avoid evil (see last week's parshah sheet), but he does much good as well. This is really the concept, in the end, of negative and positive mitzvos.

As the Maharal explains (Tifferes Yisroel), there are 365 negative mitzvos, corresponding to the number of the days of the year. This is because the primary purpose of a negative mitzvah is to help man not to destroy creation. The negative mitzvos come against the part of man's yetzer hara that has little trouble finding the energy to do that which is counter-productive to life and the purpose of creation.

In fact, if you find yourself unduly motivated to do something, it is a good time to ask why. Even a righteous person, who appears to have little difficulty finding the motivation to do a mitzvah, still is cognizant of his inner battle, and works to overcome his yetzer hara. His greatness is in being able to recognize the will of his yetzer hara as being different from his own will, and therefore, can overcome it.

Likewise, when you find yourself too lazy to do a good deed, you also have to ask why. Positive mitzvos, of which there are 248, correspond to the limbs of the body because they symbolize our intellectual and emotional control over our physical limbs. The 248 positive mitzvos beg the question: who works for whom? Do you work for your limbs, or do your limbs work for you? Don't wait to be inspired ... inspire yourself! Create a desire for the Torah of G-d, and inspire yourself to meditate on Eternal Truth day and night. For, if you do, then ...

He shall be like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in the proper season. (Tehillim 1:3)

The water, of course, symbolizes Torah and life. Being planted by such a source means drawing one's energy and meaning from Torah itself, and then disseminating those teachings to benefit others as well.

In a way, these first three verses of Tehillim parallel the first three verses of the Torah. With respect to the Torah, the first verse is an introduction to all that will follow, stating the general principle of creation: G-d makes everything, and all is according to His will.

The second verse of the Torah can be said to represent the "storm" before the "calm," so-to-speak,

as if all that will ever become throughout history is in incubation, a period of gestation during which creation awaits fruition. The creation of light, in the third posuk, represents the actualization of the will of G-d as His Holy Light emanates out and brings life to a deadened world. Only now is G-d "compelled" to comment: "It is good."

In the first verse of this first paragraph of Tehillim, Dovid HaMelech stated the general principle: Consciously avoiding evil is the basis of doing good. However, there is no instruction yet in this verse as to how best to do this; that is the subject of the second posuk.

Nevertheless, even the second posuk, by speaking of "desire" and "meditation," deals only with inner being. Meditation is an active-passive process to bring about realization. Desire, itself, is the ultimate motivator, but not an action itself, per se. Both meditation and desire are vehicles to bring about realization (as our parshah teaches, first you have to "see" before you can do), and ultimately, motivation to accomplish.

Then, Dovid HaMelech speaks about a tree, a symbol of life and strength--and man as well. But there are trees that yield no fruit, and then there are trees that yield tremendous, life-sustaining fruit. It is such people that become the leaders of men, and the teachers in Israel, lifting, inspiring, and motivating the masses to seek out G-d for themselves. It is such people, like Avraham Avinu himself, who are compared to the Holy Light of creation, which is called "good," that is, the fulfillment of the purpose of creation. Hence, the Midrash paraphrases and says:

G-d said, "Let there be light!" And there was Avraham! (Bereishis Rabbah 2:3)

Have a great Shabbos,  
Pinchas Winston

---