

WHO WAS MOSHE RABBEINU?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

*This is the blessing which Moshe, man of the G-d, blessed the Children of Israel before his death.
(Devarim 33:1)*

Nothing unusual about this verse--reads just fine the way it is. Unless, of course, you are the Rokeach, and you have the mysteries of Torah at your finger tips:

"In the book, 'Sodei Razzah,' the Ba'al Rokeach establishes 'that the angel appointed over Rosh Chodesh Adar is ... (I am not going to transliterate the name, but it has in it the word for 'blessing' and a name of G-d) ... Because this angel is the Angel of Blessing, it starts off saying, 'This is the blessing which Moshe blessed ...' since he blessed them in the month of Adar, the month over which this Angel of Blessing is appointed. This is also why it says, 'man of the G-d,' as if to say, 'the angel that is called this helped to oversee the blessing of Israel.'" (Megillos Amukos, Ophen 44)

Did Moshe enlist this angel for any specific reason? After all, what does it take to bless a nation with words?

It depends upon the brochah, and the one that Moshe was imparting to the Jewish people was no ordinary blessing:

... This is the blessing that Avraham gave to Yitzchak, and Yitzchak gave to Ya'akov, as it says, "G-d should give you from the dew of Heaven ..." (Bereishis 27:28), and from the blessing of Avraham; this is the blessing with which Ya'akov blessed his sons, "each one according to his blessing ..." (Bereishis 49:28). And this was the blessing in Moshe's hand as well ... (Pli'ah, Parashas Toldos)

Unlike many blessings that are made up at the time to suit the occasion, Moshe's blessing was one that flowed down from Heaven and through time. Each of the above mentioned leaders were channels for a special holy light that was to flow through them to the people--not a simple task for a mortal man, which is why Moshe invoked Heavenly assistance.

This is probably also why these blessings come at the end of the life of the leader. It is at a time like this that a person rises above physicality, since it has little meaning to him then. In a spiritual sense, he exists between This world and the next one, and therefore, in a better position to be that link

between Heaven and earth.

This is hinted to with the words, "man of the G-d," which have rarely been used for Moshe in the Torah. At this stage of life, Moshe himself was like an angel, and therefore a perfect conduit for blessing from Above.

In fact, the Pesikta says that, all of Moshe's life he wanted to bless the Jewish people, but the Angel of Death would not allow it. Finally, just before his death, Moshe "forced" the angel to allow him to, and even blessed them right in front of him, as it says, "before his death," that is, before the Angel of Death.

Shabbos Day:

There never again arose a prophet in Israel like Moshe, whom G-d spoke to face-to-face ... (Devarim 34:7-12)

Simchas Torah is all about just that: the simchah of Torah. However, true as this may be, I, personally, can't help but feel a little bit of mourning reading about the death of Moshe Rabbeinu on this joyous of all holidays, especially knowing how much he wanted to live in Eretz Yisroel. Oh, how he longed to live in Eretz Yisroel.

Therefore, I don't feel right ending off the Torah-cycle without commenting on these final possukim, or, at least, without paying somewhat of a tribute to someone who has to be the "hero" of all heroes.

Who was Moshe Rabbeinu?

We have dealt with this question before, and each time I try to add another "layer" to the painting. To begin with, even though, in the Torah, it was Moshe's surrogate mother "Batyah" (Pharaoh's daughter) who named him "Moshe" (his real mother Yocheved had yet to re-enter the picture), it was a name meant to be from Heaven.

For, according to the Arizal (Sha'ar HaGilgulim), within the name Moshe is embedded the entire history of his soul's journey to date. In fact, it is well-known, not just in the world of Kabbalah, but even in the world of "pshat," that Moshe was a reincarnation of Hevel, who, thousands of years earlier at the dawn of mankind, was murdered by his brother, Kayin (Bereishis 4:8). Nevertheless, this is not as simple as it sounds (if it sounded simple so far).

We know that a person's soul is made up of many "aspects"--the "bigger" the soul, the more "aspects" it may have. After Hevel died prematurely, his soul divided into different "sections," and this, says the Arizal, was represented by a division in his name (heh, bais, lamed), between the "heh" and the "bais-lamed."

(To simplify matters from this point onward, I will refer to the "heh" as "h" only, and the "bais-lamed" as "bl" only.)

The bl part of Hevel's soul was considered to be bad, and it first reincarnated into Lavan, the father-in-law of Ya'akov Avinu (Bereishis 24:29; 28:5). This is why Lavan's name is spelled "lamed-bais-nun"; after all, Lavan was far from being pure, as his name ("White") suggested. Quite the contrary: though Lavan was cautious to always "look good," everyone knew that he was devious and diabolical--as real a "white-washer" as they come.

>From Lavan, the bl went to Bilaam, the non-Jewish prophet that tried to curse the Jewish people in Moshe's time (Bamidbar 22:2). He also had the bl in his name (bais, lamed, ayin, mem), as did "Balak," and "Bavel" (Babylonia)--as in the Tower of Babel--for that matter.

That wasn't the end of the journey of the bl-part of Hevel's name, which has been undergoing rectification for millennia now. However, that is all we need to know for now, at least for the sake of this parshah sheet. For all we know, it might even be part of some leader's soul this very day!

The h, on the other hand, was the good part of Hevel's soul, and that came back another time around in the body of Shais, the third son born to Adam and Chava, after they complete their 130-year period of teshuvah for eating from the Tree. Thus, when Chava said that she named this son Shais:

... "Because G-d has granted (shas) me other children in place of Hevel, whom Kayin killed." (Bereishis 4:25)

--she wasn't kidding. Shais was, for the most part, Hevel, "Act Two."

After Shais was finished adding his own level of rectification to Hevel's h-soul, it came back in Noach's body, and underwent rectification again there. And this time, even before Noach died, his own son, Shem, the ancestor of Avraham and the Jewish people, received a piece of this soul as well, and it was even further rectified.

Having been quite purified through this history of righteous individuals, the h-aspect of Hevel's soul fared far better than the bl-aspect did, and this is why the h ended up inside Moshe Rabbeinu, alongside other high-level aspects of souls Moshe may have received on his own.

Hence, the name "Moshe," spelled "mem, shin, heh," has in it the letters "heh," for the "heh" of Hevel's name, and "mem-shin," which spells the name "Shem" (in reverse), the last person to have had the h before it reached Moshe. Finally, in Moshe, the h of Hevel's name came to rest in a state of perfection, which is why Moshe was able to stand before G-d and receive the Torah.

In the meantime, Kayin's own soul was splitting and traversing time through all kinds of gilgulim (reincarnations) of its own. However, we will have to wait until Parashas Bereishis, b"H, before discussing those, and how they continued on a sibling rivalry begun in the early days of creation.

In the meantime, though, you might just want to reconsider the cast of characters that make up your world. For, as the Arizal makes perfectly clear, history--all of it--is really a one-act play constantly undergoing refinement.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

This year, Simchas Torah falls on Shabbos.

Though Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah are on two separate days outside of Israel, they really belong on the same day. They belong on the same day, because, whereas Shemini Atzeres represents the special relationship between G-d and the Jewish people, Simchas Torah celebrates the "document" and "symbol" that alludes to that relationship.

Yes, we are celebrating the end of another cycle of weekly Torah readings, and the beginning of a whole new one. But, equally, if not more important, is the dancing and singing we do over the special and unique bond between Jew and G-d, held-fast together by the Torah itself.

Hence, when we pour out our hearts during the "hakofos" (circuits around the bimah with the Torah scrolls) to the point of delirious exhaustion, either by physically dancing with the Torah Scrolls, or by letting our hearts do the dancing from the distance, we come as close to dancing with the Master of the Universe Himself as we can. It is a wedding dance, of sorts.

In fact, coming out of the Ten Days of Repentance, and after "immersing" ourselves in the "waters" of purity of Yom Kippur, we are like "brides" on our wedding day--ready to unify with G-d under the thatched roofs of our sukkos, which acts like a wedding canopy. Then, having completed the ceremony, we dance away with joy on the eighth day--Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah.

One way to get perspective on what we are celebrating on Simchas Torah is summed up in the "Hadrin," which is traditionally recited upon the completion of an "order" of Mishnah or a tractate of Talmud. It reads:

We are thankful to you Hashem, our G-d, and G-d of our fathers, that You have placed our portion among those who sit in the Bais HaMedrash and not with those who sit at the "corners." For we arise early, and they arise early; we arise early for words of Torah and they arise early for wasteful words. We toil, and they toil. We arise early and receive reward, and they arise early but are not rewarded. We run, and they run. We run to the World-to-Come, and they run to destruction, as it says, "But You, O G-d, You will lower them into the well of destruction, men of bloodshed and deceit shall not live out half their days ..." (Tehillim 55:24)

Thus, Simchas Torah is the celebration that emerges from a heightened awareness of what was at stake without Torah, and what was gained through Torah. In the words of one "Ba'al Teshuvah":

"In my first year of turning towards Torah, I felt the hero for having left behind a successful secular

life for traditional Judaism. So, I told G-d in no uncertain terms,

'Look, I hope You appreciate what I have done for You, G-d, because You know that I could have happily gone the same way as the rest of them!'

In my second year, however, after learning a considerable amount more of Torah, and waking up a bit to just what Torah and Judaism were about, I was somewhat humbled by my newfound realization, and this time told G-d,

'Wow! I didn't know what I was missing! Phew ... thanks for waiting for me. From here on in, G-d, we're partners, right?'

A few years later, when I finally came to appreciate how close I had come to spiritual oblivion, and how G-d, for reasons that I do not know to this very day, saved me from the brink of eternal nothingness, I humbly whispered:

'Dear G-d ... Thank you so much ... I mean SO MUCH ... for waiting for me ... and helping me to do teshuvah. Had it been up to me, I wouldn't have waited ... You really are merciful, like we say. Perhaps You can save the rest of my fellow Jews, and help them, as You helped me!'

Who wouldn't dance with complete joy, with such a realization, on Simchas Torah?

Melave Malkah:

(Issru Chag)

But You, G-d, are a shield for me--for my honor, and to raise up my head. My voice--to G-d I cry, and He did answer me from His holy mountain. Selah (Tehillim 3:4-5)

In the previous verses, the name of G-d, Elokim was used. However, in this verse, Dovid HaMelech uses the four-letter, holy Ineffable Name, and the difference is obvious.

Elokim always denotes justice, and that's what Dovid's enemies thought would bring about his own downfall. As Chanina ben Dosa warns, "It is not snakes that kill, but sin itself!" (Brochos 34a). Dovid had made some serious mistakes, and his enemies were counting on those mistakes to act as an "Achilles heel," leaving him spiritually, and therefore, physically, vulnerable.

However, Dovid answers them by invoking the name of G-d that implies G-d in a merciful state, so-to-speak. Elokim may not be his "shield" in the end, but "Hashem" would be--once Dovid did teshuvah, which he did. And history proves who was write in the end.

That's not all that worked in Dovid HaMelech's favor. Rabbeinu Yonah wrote:

"If a sinner is beset with hardship and experiences trouble, and he accepts the suffering as being justified, this will serve as a shield against the many troubles which, strictly speaking, should come upon him ... It is the trait of the righteous to pay their debt and sing to G-d ..." (Sha'arei Teshuvah 4:12)

Hence, Dovid HaMelech's acceptance of his personal troubles--of which he had many--served, in the end, to protect him from even worse evils that, by all rights, should have befallen him. So, too, it is with everyone, which means that complaining does little to rectify a negative situation, whereas good-will acceptance of one's troubles does much to strengthen one's future position.

As a side point, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, sees in Dovid HaMelech's attitude a hint to a well-known symbol of the Jewish people, yet one, ironically, which is not spoken about in any authoritative traditional Torah source: the Magen Dovid. (Pesachim 117b does make mention of the concept of "Magen Dovid"). The six-pointed symbol alludes to Dovid HaMelech's true shield and source of protection: G-d, who rules all six directions of the physical world (Igros Moshe, O.C. 3:15).

This is why Dovid HaMelech, in spite of the political storms raging around him, outwardly displayed confidence in G-d's protection, and speaking confidently about G-d's future help in past tense, as if it was a matter of fact.

Have a great Shabbos and Yom Tov, A double portion of holiness! Pinchas Winston
