

FROM THE BEGINNING, AGAIN

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

"In the beginning ..." from the beginning, again.

Another year has come and gone,
Presenting us with a whole new dawn,
And another chance to go even deeper,
So, sit right back, and shut off your beeper!

Turn off your phones, and away from you ear,
5760 is finally here!
We can start with Bereishis one more time,
Only after you are made to survive this rhyme.

Pardon me. I couldn't resist. (Feel free to quote it anywhere.)

The woman saw that the tree was good for food, desirable to the eyes, and she desired the tree to understand and took from its fruit and ate, and gave to her husband with her, and he ate. (Bereishis 3:6)

And ate, and ate, and ate. In fact, we're still eating from the "tree" big time. Many people think--in fact trillions of people have thought over the millennia--that the sin of eating from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was a singular event of the past with just some lingering effects (like death, for example).

Wrong--very wrong.

Of course, it all depends upon how you understand the nature of the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. It is, of course, one of the deepest and most Kabbalistic (not to mention most fascinating) of all concepts known (and unknown) to man.

For example, spelling G-d's Ineffable Name vertically, the letter "yud" is said to correspond (diagrammatically) to the sefirah "Chochmah" (the upper point of the yud--the "kotz shel yud"--alludes to "Keser"); the "heh" to "Binah"; the "vav" to the six sefiros: Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod, and Yesod; and finally, the final "heh," to the tenth and final sefirah, "Malchus."

What you achieve is a Kabbalistic diagram of a tree in the ground. The Malchus is referred to as "Aretz," which means "ground," and the vertical and elongated "vav" reaching "heavenward" from the "Ground" looks like the trunk of a tree. The top part of this tree is the Upper Three Sefiros: Keser, Chochmah, and Binah.

In fact, in these terms, there is only one tree, with three possible situations. When the light of this "tree" remains in the Upper Three Sefiros, it is purely a "Tree of Life." When the light leaves Keser, and makes its way downward, so that the sefirah of "Da'as" is given existence among Chochmah and Binah, it is called, the "Tree of Knowledge" ONLY, since evil cannot exist on this level.

However, when the knowledge/da'as/light is "pulled" down among the six sefiros that correspond to the "vav," where evil can have influence, then the tree takes on the quality of the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil." This is precisely what Adam did when he considered eating from the tree in a spiritually unprepared state, and what he created as a result.

This gives a deeper meaning to Ben Bag Bag's statement:

"Turn over in it [Torah], turn over in it, for everything is in it [Torah] ..." (Pirkei Avos 5:26)

Torah is the "Tree of Life," as we say,

"It is a Tree of Life for all those who grasp it ..." (Mishlei 3:18)

--the holy light that reaches all the way up from Malchus to the top of Keser, intertwined with the primal purpose of creation. This is what the first Rashi of this parshah means, when it says that the world was "created for the sake of Torah." All else must be, by definition, contained within it.

As one moves intellectually and spiritually away from the Upper Sefiros to the lower ones, the light becomes less godly, and more mundane, so-to-speak. So, too, does the knowledge that this light represents. And it is possible, if one moves far enough away from the Source of this light, to see only the knowledge, and not the light it encases, because it is so weak at that point.

That is the vilest evil of all creation: the perception of knowledge as being ungodly, which results in ungodly perceptions, and all the destruction that continues to result from them. And that is something over which every generation has stumbled, over, and over again.

However, there remain individuals, and even small groups, in each generation who rectify the mistake in whatever way they can. In fact, according to the "Asarah Ma'amaros," (Ma'amer "Chikur Din"), a few of those individuals were alluded to by the Hebrew word for the fruit "date," "t'ainah" (tav, aleph, nun, heh). They were: Terach, Avraham, Nachor, and Haran--a father and his three sons.

This, of course, was after Terach, Avraham's father, did teshuvah-- which the rabbis said he did. And, as the Chasam Sofer points out, Haran, Avraham's brother who died in Ur Kasdim from the very fire from which Avraham was saved, was still considered righteous.

How did they achieve this rectification? By reversing the trend of their generation, and rather than "drag" the holy light from Above down into the mundane world around them, they, instead, elevated themselves to the holy world Above them. And, in doing so, they helped transform the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil back into the Tree of Life, as much as they were permitted to do.

Shabbos Day:

Kayin went out from before G-d and settled in the Land of Nod, east of Aiden ... (Bereishis 4:16)

Not only was the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil not a singular event in mankind's long history, but the lives of Kayin and Hevel also represent a recurring theme throughout history.

Kayin was the name, rectification is the game.

In fact, so much of the future to come after Kayin and his descendants would be long gone--eliminated completely by the Flood in Noach's time--would be to rectify Kayin's "Nefesh," the lowest part of his soul. Bodies may die, but souls come back (if necessary) in the form of "gilgulim" (reincarnations; Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Hakdamah 36). And, if necessary, they keep coming back until they achieve rectification (or else ...).

To begin with, says the Arizal, the Nefesh of Kayin came back in the body of Keinan (Bereishis 5:9), which is alluded to by the similarity of names. After Keinan completed his share of the rectification, the Nefesh of Kayin went to Mehalelel (Bereishis 5:12), perhaps even while Keinan was still living (which happens).

Eventually, Kayin's Nefesh made its way into the bodies of Nadav and Avihu, Aharon's sons who died offering an unauthorized Incense-Offering thousands of years later in the newly-anointed Mishkan (Vayikra 9:1). However, their deaths, apparently, were also part of the rectification of Kayin's Nefesh, which then found completion in Pinchas' act of zealousness, when he killed Zimri and Cozbi and saved the entire Jewish people (Bamidbar 25:1).

Even this has been an over-simplification of the wanderings of Kayin's souls. For example, the "evil" part of Kayin's soul is what "fuels" Amalek, the nemesis of the Jewish people. Even Korach, who challenged Moshe Rabbeinu's authority in the desert towards the end of the forty years, was a spiritual "descendant" of Kayin's negative sparks (Bamidbar 16:1).

The better part of Kayin's soul eventually ended up in the great prophet, Shmuel, who eventually killed King Agag, the king of Amalek at the time (I Shmuel 15:32). And, it didn't stop there; even the famous and heroic Rebi Akiva "inherited" some of Kayin's soul. This is why, the Arizal explains, Rebi Akiva had to come from an ancestor who converted to Judaism, and why he spent the first forty

years of his life as a Torah simpleton.

In fact, the journey of the souls throughout history explains a lot of what is REALLY going on behind the scenes, whether the "hosts" of these souls are aware of this or not. This does not mean a person does not have a soul of his own; he does. A person's complete soul has many parts, and this means that a soul can contain elements from others of the past which are in search of rectification through our lives.

Perhaps the journey of the souls of Kayin and Hevel continues on even today. It certainly did right up until the time of the Arizal's death (1572 CE), after making it through countless rabbis of the mishnaic, Talmudic, and post-Talmudic eras.

What's the point of knowing this?

Well, for one thing, it adds depth and meaning to everyday life, because, it helps us to understand what's at stake in life, at least behind the scenes, and to reconsider the essence of many of the "characters" that make up the "cast" of our daily "plays."

As well, it makes coincidences, such as Bill Clinton (a.k.a. "Slick Willy"), working in the White House all that more entertaining--when you consider that "Bill" in Hebrew can be spelled "bais-lamed" (when the "chiruk" is represented by the "dot" under the "bais), and "White House," in Hebrew is, "Bais Lavan," "House of Lavan."

Who was "Lavan" (spelled "lamed-bais-nun")? Why, as we mentioned last parshah (Zos HaBrochah, "Shabbos Day"), he was the original "slick" one of history, whom Ya'akov had to survive before crossing the "Yabok" (that's "Y2K" in English), on the way to becoming "Yisroel" ...

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Chanoch lived 65 years and fathered Mesushelach. Chanoch walked with G-d after he fathered Mesushelach 300 years, and had sons and daughters. All the days of Chanoch were 365 years; Chanoch walked with G-d, and he was not, for G-d took him. (Bereishis 5:21-24)

"He was a righteous man, but his mind was easily turned to evil. Therefore, The Holy One, Blessed is He, took him away quickly and made him die before his time. This is why the Torah uses a different expression when referring to his death by writing 'and he was not'--not in the world to complete his years." (Rashi)

Rashi, at least, explains the unusual language of the Torah. However, this little deviance from the normal wording of the Chumash is an opening to a much deeper story and explanation, that, given the nature of this week's d'var Torah, is not out of place to discuss. To do this, we will have to turn to "Seder HaDoros":

"After Chanoch fathered Mesushelach he walked with G-d and became disgusted by the evil ways of man, and instead cleaved to G-d, and with knowledge and understanding he separated from man and hid from them for many days. After quite a while, he prayed to G-d from his house and an angel of G-d called to him, and he answered, 'Here I am.' He told him to leave his house in which he hid and to go out and teach the people how to behave and what to do. He went out and gathered people and informed them about the ways of G-d, and he sent out word that all who wish to know the ways of G-d should come to Chanoch. Everyone came to Chanoch and they made him king and they bowed down to the ground before him, and they learned the wisdom of G-d and of His ways; they served G-d all the days of Chanoch's life. Even the kings came and gathered--130 kings--and nobles as well, and made him king and he taught them and made peace among them. He ruled over them for 243 years ... At that time [many years later], Chanoch desired to separate himself from others and hide himself for three days to serve G-d like he did at the beginning, and then reveal himself for one day to teach them the way of G-d; he did this for many years. Then, he hid himself for six days, and came out on the seventh day, then once a month, and then once a year, until the kings, nobles, and peoples wanted to see him and learn from him, and hear his words, but were unable to out of fear of approaching him because of his godliness; they were afraid to die. The kings advised [the people] to approach him all at once, when he [Chanoch] came to them, which they did. He taught them wisdom, understanding, lofty ideas, and fear of G-d, and they were greatly amazed by his wisdom and bowed to him saying, 'Long live the king!' After a time, an angel of G-d called to him from Heaven and said, 'Come up to Heaven and rule the angels like you ruled the people.' When Chanoch heard this, he gathered together all the people of the land and told them that he was asked to ascend to Heaven, but did not know when he would go, and wanted to teach them. He gave them statutes and judgments. He sat among them continually, and while he spoke to them, they lifted their eyes and saw the form of a large horse descending from Heaven, and they told Chanoch. He told them, 'It is on my account that it descends, and the time is approaching that I must leave you.' The horse came down and stood before him, and he instructed that word go out to all who wanted to know the way of G-d to come that day. All the people, kings, and nobles came out and did not leave him and he taught them to go in the ways of G-d and made peace among them again. He mounted the horse, and left, and 800,000 people followed after him the first day. On the second day, he told them, 'Return to your tents in case you die.' Some left and the rest continued for another six days and he told them, 'Return, in case you die.' On the sixth day, he told them, 'Return because tomorrow I will ascend to Heaven, and all those who remain will die.' And they left ... On the seventh day, Chanoch went up in a storm wind to Heaven on a fiery horse ..." (Seder HaDoros, Chanoch, Year 622 - 987 from creation)

Sounds familiar, no? It seems that Eliyahu was not the first one to ascend to Heaven by way of a fiery "vehicle."

To where did Chanoch go, and why? According to Kabbalah, Heaven summoned Chanoch to change his role from earthly tzaddik and king to "Minister of the Interior," that is, head of all the

angels. He himself became an angel, bearing a specific name that shows up in various different writings, and even certain prayers ("mem-tet-tet ...", etc.), and remains close to G-d to this very day. Remarkably, all of this emerges from the words, "And he was not, and G-d took him."

MELAVE MALKAH:

... I lay down and slept, yet I awoke, for G-d supports me. I do not fear the myriad of people who place themselves around me from every side ... (Tehillim 3:6-7)

On one hand, these words are the common theme of Tehillim. On the other, it is wonderful providence that these particular verses follow the Ten Days of Repentance and Succos. For, sin can be said to be the result of one's psychological inability to fulfill the following axiom of Jewish belief:

Blessed is the one who trusts in G-d; then G-d will be His security. (Yirmiyahu 17:7)

This is because, when one trusts in G-d, then one is content to make a "reasonable" effort to succeed and wait for G-d to bring him success. And if, after approaching the situation halachically, and after making a reasonable effort he does not succeed, the one who trusts in G-d assumes that Heaven knows better.

In other words, sin is very often the result of "taking" success when we perceive that G-d is not coming through for us. We want something, and maybe even feel we have it coming to us. Yet, we are without the object of our desires, and feel compelled to resort to means to acquire it that, upon consideration, is against hashkofah and perhaps, even halachah. Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Succos come to counteract that philosophy.

Furthermore, in each case, the verse from Tehillim and the verse from Yirmiyahu specifically makes it clear that we must first be willing to go with G-d, even in the face of uncertainty. Only then will G-d become our "security," because free-will necessitates that we take the first step--on our own.

This is the overall message of Succos, during which we move outside our "fixed" and seemingly secure homes, into huts with thatched roofs. We live there and sleep there, with the belief that this is what Heaven wants, and we do it with the confidence that G-d will protect us. And, those of us living here in Eretz Yisroel understand and FEEL the words of Dovid HaMelech that follow:

"I do not fear the myriad of people who place themselves around me from every side ..."

--because that is our reality. We are surrounded on all sides by "cousins" that act towards us with hostility. The peace agreement has changed very little, except that those who long to see us leave this land forever have moved in a little closer. It certainly has yet to change their dogma, attitude, and school textbooks.

People ask those who make aliyah how they can live with such risk. Dovid HaMelech's words spell out the challenge of the Jew, and allude to his reward for living by them.

Rise up G-d, save me my G-d! For you have struck all of my enemies on the cheek. You broke the teeth of the wicked. Salvation is G-d's; upon Your people is Your blessing. Selah. (Tehillim 8-g)

We end this tehillah with this closing statement. Perhaps Dovid HaMelech was providing us with a glimpse of the three-stage process of Divine retribution against the nations who have tormented the Jewish people throughout the ages.

First there is the proverbial, "slap in the face"--a Divine disgracing of those who disgraced the Divine. Next, comes the disabling of the enemy--the "breaking of the teeth," like we do to the Evil Son at the Seder Table, whose single biggest problem was a lack of trust in G-d.

And finally, there is the elimination of all the enemies of the Jewish people, the basis of Jewish redemption and salvation. Those of us who anticipated this glorious end to our long and arduous history will be able to see it coming, and rejoice along the way. Those who gave up on G-d, the Jewish people, and history, will be shocked to find out what all of it had been leading up to--and left out, when it is all said and done.

Have a great Shabbos,
And a Wonderful "Beginning."

Pinchas Winston
