

THE NAME OF THE GAME

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

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

Another brisa taught: On the seventh of Adar Moshe died and on the seventh of Adar Moshe was born. How do we know he died on the seventh of Adar? Because it says, "And, Moshe, the servant of G-d died there" (Devarim 34:5), and, it is written, "The Children of Israel cried for Moshe for thirty days in the glen of Moav" (Devarim 34:8), and, it says, "And it came to be after Moshe, the servant of G-d, died" (Yehoshua 1:1), and, it is written, "Moshe my servant has died -- arise and cross over (Yehoshua 1:2), and it is written, "Go through the midst of the camp and command the people saying, 'Prepare provision for yourselves, for, in another three days you will cross this Jordan'" (Yehoshua 1:11), and, it is written, "The people ascended from the Jordan on the tenth of the first month" (Yehoshua 4:19). Go and count backwards thirty-three days, and you will see that Moshe died on the seventh of Adar (Rashi: They are the ten days of Nissan and twenty-three days of Adar, which brings us to the seventh of Adar). How do we know that Moshe was born in the seventh day of Adar? Because it says, "I am 120 years old today, and I am no longer able to go out and to come" (Devarim 31:2); the Torah did not need to say "today" -- why did the Torah say "today"? To teach that The Holy One, Blessed is He, sits and fills the days of the righteous to the day, and to the month, as it says, "The days of your life I will fill" (Shemos 23:26). (Kiddushin 38a)

That's a lot of Talmud just to prove that Moshe died the same day he was born, 120 years later to the moment, because, the concept of G-d giving tzaddikim fullness of days is there regardless of the above discussion. Who needs it, if the Torah's main emphasis is not history, but morality?

I don't know. But, what I DO know is that part of Moshe's "blessing" to the Jewish people in death was the fact that he died on the exact same day as he was born, for, that reality played a major role in the redemption of the Jewish people 920 years later. Behold, the Talmud reveals:

It was taught: Since the lot fell in the month of Adar he (Haman) was very happy, and he said, "The lot fell for me in the month that Moshe died!" but he did not know that on the seventh of Adar Moshe died, and, on the seventh of Adar, Moshe was born. (Megillah 13b)

This, of course, is part of the Talmudic discussion that says, before G-d inflicts punishment on the

Jewish people He makes sure the "cure" already exists. Hence, in keeping with this idea, Moshe could not have died on the seventh of Adar without first having been born on the seventh of Adar, since it was the month of his death that provided Haman with the impetus to destroy the Jewish people.

Thus, Moshe's birth was the source of the Jewish people's salvation from Haman's annihilistic plans, which, perhaps, is why it was kept such a mystery in the Torah. Furthermore, if you recall Moshe's birth, the Talmud comments:

It is written here, "... And she (Yocheved) saw that he (Moshe) was good ..." (Shemos 2:2) and there it is written, "G-d saw the light, that it was good." (Bereishis 1:4). (Sotah 12a)

The Talmud is setting up a comparison between Moshe and the Hidden Light of creation, since they are both described using the same word: good. In other words, it is not incidental that the Torah refers to Moshe as being "good," but an indication that there was something special about him from the moment he was born, as the Talmud first explained:

The Chachamim say that when Moshe was born, the entire house filled with light. (Sotah 12a)

Perhaps, then, the following from the Megillas Esther may have added significance:

For the Jews there was light (Esther 8:16)

Which light? The light of Moshe Rabbeinu's birth, which was the key to washing away the darkness of Haman and Golus Bavel, which became a powerful source of redemption once it became the same day on which Moshe died. It is true: Tzaddikim are greater in death than during their lifetimes (Sanhedrin 47a).

Shabbos Day:

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

As most people know, the holidays of Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah are on the same day in Eretz Yisroel. Now, normally we say, "One should not combine joyous events" (Moed Katan 8b), which, would necessitate that Simchas Torah come on the next day as it is outside of Eretz Yisroel, perhaps, just like Rosh Hashanah is also celebrated over two days in Eretz Yisroel.

But they ARE on the same day, in the end -- and the reason is simple: it is all ONE simchah! (Not to mention, this year, Shabbos as well!!)

For, Shemini Atzeres celebrates the special relationship the Jewish people have with G-d (see Rashi

on Vayikra 23:36); Simchas Torah celebrates the special relationship the Jewish people have with Torah. And, the Zohar ties it all up rather nicely by stating: The Holy One, Blessed is He, and Torah are one; one who merits a portion of Torah merits the Name of The Holy One, Blessed is He (Zohar 90b). Elsewhere, the Zohar says, "there is no Torah except for The Holy One, Blessed is He."

Thus, the day on which both Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah are celebrated is the time that both relationships ought to dovetail into one, where the grasping and cherishing of Torah is also the cherishing of one's relationship with G-d. The feeling of love of G-d is the fulfillment of the holiday of Shemini Atzeres; the feeling of love of Torah is the fulfillment of the holiday of Simchas Torah. The feeling of both at the same time is the fulfillment of what it means to be part of the Jewish people in totality.

Because, it is very possible to feel one and not the other. For example, there are some people who love Torah and are committed to it, but, have difficulty staying focused on G-d, especially when it comes to prayer. Whereas learning Torah for them is an experience, an overwhelming one at that, praying to G-d is a ritual, an underwhelming one at that.

Other people love to pray to G-d, and pray to G-d, and pray to G-d, in one form or another. That is a wonderful thing, for, the Talmud calls prayer one of those things that are at the highest heights (Brochos 6b). However, the Talmud also calls prayer something of This World, and, Torah, something for the sake of the World-to-Come (Shabbos 10a), since the former often deals with crises in everyday life.

Obviously we are talking about a balance, one that is suitable to the individual. There will always be some people within Klal Yisroel who will be better suited to prayer than learning, and some people better suited to learning than prayer. It all depends, as the Arizal explains, upon the "root" of one's soul. There will also be people who will excel at both, and some who will excel at neither.

However, EVERYONE can love both with all of their heart; that is, everyone can feel tremendous love of G-d and of His Torah, AND MUST. Very often, when that is the case, prayer becomes a more uplifting experience, as does the learning of Torah, no matter where one's soul is rooted. For, whether it is tefilah or Torah, both have one goal in mind: feeling the Presence of G-d everywhere we are, no matter what we are doing, or when. It's all avodas Hashem -- service of G-d.

Never mind the fact that, outside of Israel, the two holidays fall on separate days. The message is the same for all Jews, everywhere, and, at all times. Perhaps, if you think about it, this is the underlying meaning of the closing parshah of the Torah, which, we read specifically on Simchas Torah:

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

The blessing is, really, the Torah that Moshe Rabbeinu taught us and with which he left us. It came

from a "man of G-d," someone for whom talking to G-d never was secondary to learning and teaching His Torah. It ought to be the same, at least, for us.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Moshe was 120 years old when he died. There never again arose a prophet in Israel like Moshe, whom G-d spoke to face-to-face, [and who could perform] all the signs and wonders which G-d sent him to do in the land of Egypt, against Paroah, all his servants and all his land, or any of the mighty acts and awesome sights that Moshe displayed before all the eyes of Israel. (Devarim 34:7-12)

That's not all the world lost with the death of Moshe Rabbeinu, as the Talmud explains:

Rabbah son of Rava, and some say, Rebi Hillel son of Rebi Wols, said: From the days of Moshe until Rebi (Yehudah HaNasi), we have not found Torah and greatness (wealth) is one place (a single individual). Is that so? There was Yehoshua? (No,) there was (also) Elazar (who was equal to him). There was Elazar? (No,) there was (also) Pinchas. There was Pinchas? (No,) there were the Elders (as well). There was Shaul? (No,) there was (also) Shmuel. Did not Shmuel die (during his lifetime)? We're talking about over an entire lifetime. What about Dovid? There was Ira the Ye'iri. But he died (during his lifetime)? We're talking about over an entire lifetime. There was Chizkiah? No, there was (also) Shevna. There was Ezra? (No,) there was (also) Nechemiah. Rav Acha son of Rava said: I can add that from the time of Rebi until the time of Rav Ashi, we have not found Torah and greatness in one place. (Gittin 59a)

And, the truth is, even this doesn't tell the whole story. What was really lost with the death of Moshe Rabbeinu was a single individual capable of bringing the redemption, single-handedly. According to tradition, Moshe's spiritual greatness was so superlative that he was able to tap into spiritual energy sources so powerful that he could have, had the Jewish people been ready and willing, ushered in the Final Redemption right then and there.

This was because The level of Moshe Rabbeinu was from the Ohr HaGanuz itself -- the Hidden Light of creation. Therefore, says the Talmud, the Torah was given through him, as well as all chidushei Torah (Torah novella) throughout time.

This is the way the more esoteric side of Torah phrases it:

... He was from the "Mystery of the Upper Emanation" of Adam HaRishon, which was withdrawn as a result of the sin. Had the Jewish people not sinned [with the golden calf, then] Moshe would have entered the land and would have been in a position to return the world to perfection from before the [Adam's] sin. (Dayah 2:277b).

Because, as the Arizal explains, it all comes down to soul "roots," that is, the level within the Sefiros from which one's soul originates, and Moshe's descended from the heights of the sefirah,

Chochmah. This is why the Talmud made the comparison between the light Moshe emanated at birth and the Hidden Light of creation. It took such a high-level soul to redeem the Jewish people from Egypt, and, according to the Arizal, it will take such a high-level soul to redeem the world once again, in the Days of Moshiach.

MELAVE MALKAH:

A Song of Ascents -- by Dovid. If not for G-d Who had been with us --let Israel say it now! If not for G-d Who was with us, when men rose against us, then, they would have swallowed us alive, when they were angry with us. Then the waters would have inundated us, the current would have surged across our soul. Then, the treacherous waters would have surged across our soul. (Tehillim 124:1-4)

Here, Dovid HaMelech is giving praise to G-d for saving the Jewish people from its enemies throughout all the generations. As the Haggadah says, "In every generation, our enemies rise to destroy us"

And why are we still here? It is a question that baffles any historian who takes our history to heart, especially given that the Jewish people are not the warrior-type. We have our giants and our militarily-adept types, but, for the most part, we are made up of Ya'akov Avinus -- without the hands of Eisav.

But, then again, who needs the hand of Eisav when he has the hand of G-d?! G-d is our lifesaver Who saves us from drowning in the tumultuous seas of world history, and hopefully, b'ezras Hashem (G-d willing), from this drowning sensation we are experiencing today. In fact, it was written a couple hundred years ago:

"This is the language of the Bais Yechiel:

In the book, 'Emes L'Ya'akov,' on the stories of the Talmud, by Rabbeinu Ya'akov of Lissa, the author of 'Nesivos Mishpat' and 'Chavas Da'as,' he wrote an interpretation of the stories of Rabbah bar Bar Chanah. One of the stories has Rabbah bar Bar Chana sailing with a group of men at sea, and docking at what they thought was dry land. They went onto this island and began to cook and bake there. In reality, they were on a large fish, and, when the fish felt the heat of the cooking, it turned over. The entire group fell into the sea, and, if the boat had not been close by, they would have drowned.

The author of the 'Nesivos' explained:

Rabbah bar Bar Chanah saw with ruach hakodesh (holy spirit, a minor form of prophecy) that, in the End-of-Days, Israel would rule over a particular people, whom they will believe to have no hope of ever overcoming them. Therefore, Israel will humble them, and when this people become troubled

enough, they will 'turn the plate on its face' and turn against Israel. If Moshiach is not forthcoming, then Israel will 'drown' from all its troubles.

I showed this account of the 'Nesivos' to my teacher, Rebi Nachum Partzovitch, zt"l, immediately after the Yom Kippur War. He told me that these words were written with ruach hakodesh, since, at the time of the Nesivos, it would only be possible through prophecy to say that Israel would rule over any people, something incomprehensible at that time.

My teacher, HaGaon Rebi Nachum, zt"l, told me a story of how Rebi Boruch Ber, zt"l (1866-1939) from Kaminetz, every time he mentioned the name of the Nesivos, would refer to him as 'The Holy Nesivos,' something he was not accustomed to do for any other gaon of his time, except for Rebi Akiva Eiger (1761-1837)"

Are treacherous waters surging across our soul?

We would do well to learn the rest of this short little, but powerful psalm:

Blessed is G-d, Who did not give us as prey for their teeth. Our soul escaped like a bird from the hunters' trap; the snare broke and free are free(6-7)

When is this the case? When Our help is through the Name of G-d, Maker of Heaven and Earth. (8)

Do you think we'll EVER learn?

Have a great Shabbos, Yom Tov, and "Kabbalos HaTorah,"
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