

NOTHING TO FEAR EXCEPT NO FEAR ITSELF

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

Know in your heart that just as a man criticizes his son, so does G-d, your G-d, criticize you. Therefore, keep the commandments of G-d, your G-d; go in His ways; fear Him. (Devarim 8:5-6)

Tisha B'Av is behind us now by two weeks, and most people probably feel its been about four weeks since we sat on the floor and mourned the loss and lack of the Bais HaMikdosh. Why make any connection to the that black day in the Jewish calendar now while we're supposed to be seeking comfort?

The answer is simple: Moshiach didn't come and the Temple has not yet returned. Therefore, the messages of Tisha B'Av continue to nag at us until we rectify the situation, EVEN in these days of comfort.

The Zohar says on Parashas Vayishlach, when Ya'akov fought the Angel of Eisav: Anyone who eats on Tisha B'Av is like one who eats the gid hanashe -- the sciatic nerve in the hind quarter of an animal which the Torah forbids a Jew to eat. Even though eating on Tisha B'Av is a rabbinical prohibition and eating the gid hanashe is a Torah prohibition, still, the Zohar finds reason to compare, and it is very important to understand why.

To begin with, the Zohar states, the 365 days of the solar year correspond to the 365 tendons in a human body, which correspond to the 365 Negative Mitzvos in the Torah, and, to which an angel has been assigned for each. As it turns out that, the Zohar explains, Tisha B'Av corresponds to the gid hanashe, which corresponds to the prohibition against eating it, which, as you may have guessed (and should have guessed!), is connected to the Angel of Eisav.

In other words, Tisha B'Av is that angel's day; for the time being, he controls it. Does that not explain Jewish vulnerability on this Jewish 'Day of Infamy'?

It does. However, it does not explain what connection the gid hanashe serves by being associated with this day. For that, we have to go back to the original struggle between Ya'akov Avinu and Eisav's guardian angel (Bereishis 32:25).

After struggling the entire night, the Torah tells us, Ya'akov appeared victorious as the sun rose the

next morning. However, as Ya'akov got up, the angel took one last shot at Ya'akov, and, unable to damage the body of Ya'akov, which represents Torah, he reached for the thigh of Ya'akov, and caused his sciatic nerve (gid) to jump (hanashe), which, the Zohar says represents the supporters of Torah.

However, it also represents the 'Chitzonios', the outer, more external aspects of life, superficialities, if you will. For, the body is really the main part of the person, within which most of the main bodily functions occur. The legs are important, but one could live without them, if, G-d forbid, one was forced to, and therefore, Kabbalistically, they are called 'bar m'gufo' -- 'external to the body'.

Thus, the angel's damaging of the gid hanashe represented a new vulnerability to Chitzonios within Ya'akov and his descendants (even though the tribes were already born). In simple layman's terms, no matter how spiritual a Jew may become, he still has a vulnerability to be dragged into superficial matters, and, to an extent that he can lose the forest for the trees, and abandon all that is dear to his soul.

This was what trapped the tribe of Shimon into taking daughters of Midian, and serving Ba'al Pe'or: they went shopping for linen! That's right, linen! This is what led the tribes to bring back those same daughters of Midian after taking revenge against Midian, which caused Moshe to become extremely angry with, asking them, "How could you do it?!"

This was really what Yirmiyahu was asking with 'Eichah' as well: How could your priorities get so mixed up that you could make the trivial important, and the important trivial, and let things come down to THIS?!" And this is what G-d asked Adam HaRishon after he ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, when He said, "Aiyekah?" which has the same letters as the word 'eichah', as if to say, "How could you throw away so MUCH for so LITTLE?"

And, incidentally, the Zohar explains that it was through the left thigh that the yetzer hara entered Adam and mankind.

Thus, Moshe Rabbeinu's words are just reiterating this message. He is asking us to remember our inherent spiritual vulnerability to be pulled into the world of materialism, to make it so important that we downgrade our spiritual striving and expectations. Fearing G-d, in this context, means being afraid of wasting life and living the life of the nations around us, in EVERY generation.

When we forget and fall, then we are only on the level of 'Ya'akov'. When we protect ourselves against superficial aspects of life (which may be fine for the gentile nations but not for one who is meant to live close to G-d), then, we rise to the level of 'Yisroel'.

When one eats on Tisha B'Av, the day that we mourn the loss of the Temple and House of G-d on earth, we blatantly express our choice: ignore the victory of Ya'akov and fall prey to the damage of the Angel of Eisav, his world of chitzonios, and, at least in a spiritual sense, consume the very symbol of the warning against doing so: the gid hanashe.

Shabbos Day:

Now, Israel, what does G-d, your G-d, want from you, except to fear G-d... (Devarim 10:12)

President Roosevelt said, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." His words were those of encouragement to a distraught generation which had become debilitated by The Great Depression of the Thirties. He had to stimulate the generation and instill within them enough confidence so that they would be willing to take risks and get the economy going once again and the country back on track.

Fear can be very incapacitating, as every recession reminds us. However, it can also be very exhilarating, as we have experienced on many occasions when be chased by something scary. However, in all cases, it is an indispensable aspect of true service of G-d, because of human nature.

Tisha B'Av is behind us, and we are now in the 'Weeks of Comfort', headed straight for Elul Zman and preparation for the Asares Yemai Teshuvah -- the Ten Days of Repentance. We go from a day of sorrow, to a period of relief, to one of reverence, and, it's not incidental.

G-d made man so that he could go to the World-to-Come and enjoy the Divine Presence for Eternity. To do that, G-d made free-will possible so that man could choose good and 'earn' the World-to-Come, an intrinsic part of enjoying it. To do that, G-d made the existence of evil possible, so that man could have a choice between good and evil. And, once that became reality, then, it also became possible for man to get spiritually 'lazy' and slack off.

To reverse the trend, we require something that will encourage us to not be spiritually lazy anymore. This, of course, is in order that we should choose good and forsake evil, so that we can earn larger portions in the World-to-Come, and, ultimately, enjoy the sublime pleasure of G-d's Presence for Eternity.

Now, ideally we should be able to inspire ourselves; that would be the intelligent thing to do. With respect to students in school, you have the type who knows and understands the importance of keeping up with the work all year round so that, come exam time, preparation for the finals will be manageable. And, then of course, you have the type who needs to feel the potential for failure breathing down his neck, before he can find adequate motivation to cram for the exams.

It is true in life as well: you have people whom, everyday, make a point of serving G-d with zealousness, and, you have people whom, everyday, do not serve G-d, perhaps even at all, until they get the scare of their lives. And then, all of a sudden, they are spiritually changed and charged people, ready to serve G-d with sincerity. Too bad about all the lost time in the meantime.

That is why there are really two levels of fear. For, as we have pointed out on numerous occasions,

the Hebrew word for 'fear' is the same one that is used for 'seeing'. Thus, when we talk about FEARING G-d, we are also talking about SEEING G-d, a higher level of fear that is based more upon the recognition of G-d's good and love for His creation, which motivates us to apply ourselves in the service of G-d -- because it is the best thing for everyone.

The lower level of fear is the one that most people are used to: Am I ever going to get it for doing THAT sin! Boy, I must have made G-d angry with that transgression... Wonder what it will cost me... I better repent now before G-d gives it to me but good!

Either way the fear is meant to motivate us; either way it is for our own good, to enable us to fulfill our potential as human beings and maximize our portion in the World-to-Come, something we may not appreciate now, but, will in the future. The most frightening situation would be having little or no fear of G-d at all.

Thus, Tisha B'Av, when we have to remind ourselves just how far Hashem will hide His face is a good motivator to prepare us for the days of repentance coming up, when we examine our lives and try to rearrange our priorities as suits people trying to earn portions in the World-to-Come.

SEUDAH SHLISHIS:

"If you diligently keep My commandments which I command you to do, to love G-d your G-d, go in all of His ways, and cling to him, then G-d will dispossess all these nations before you, and you will take from na-tions greater and mightier than your are. Every place upon which the soles of your feet will tread will become yours; from the desert to Lebanon, from river of the Euphrates to the Mediterranean Sea -- these will be your boundaries. No person will be able to stand up to you, because G-d, your G-d, will spread the panic of you across the land that you will walk, as He said He would." (Devarim 11:22-25)

Compare this to the following headline from the Jerusalem Post (Monday, July 30, 2001):

"Jerusalem Residents Live In Bomb-Panic"

Seems like just the opposite of the above promise; no one fears the Jews anywhere, but, Jews around the world are beginning to live in fear again. Not just that, but, if what I read this morning is true, Saddam Hussein is building up his nerve and army to move through Jordan to Israel to help the Palestinians against the Israelis.

"Stupid" you say? How many wars, small or large, do you know of that have started for "smart" reasons?

It's a no-brainer, as they say. The Torah spells it out; we spill it out.

This year, the pubs were allowed to open on Tisha B'Av. Thus, not only did Jews eat on Tisha B'Av, but, they even made merry on one of the saddest days of the year designed to connect us to our

meaning in life. And, when the rabbis expressed their deep regret over this decision, you-know-who angrily lashed out at the rabbis for "imposing Judaism on secular Israelis."

Granted, many of them don't know better. Whatever Jewish education they were given was slanted, terribly slanted. The possibility of Torah being authentic was never entertained in most Chiloni schools, and thus, Charedim were, and are, portrayed as something from the reviled past.

As a religious Jew living in Israel, it often feels like being on a boat with other people, some of whom insist upon drilling holes in the hull. Why? "Because it's fun... It's what I want to do... What I feel like doing..."

"Yea, but we're all in one boat!" I want to tell them. "If you sink MY boat, you sink YOUR boat as well!" But they don't hear it. They imagine that they are on a different boat altogether, and, if anyone is going to sink, it is going to be me. They couldn't be more wrong, wherever THEY may live in the world.

How do I know? Because, Torah principles, such as "Every Jew is a guarantor for his brother" (Sanhedrin 28b), tells us so. And, if that is not good enough (and, for the non-believing Jew, it is not), then we have the horse's mouth:

The Palestinian grudge against Israel is not just a political one, but a religious one as well. So says Director of Palestinian Media Watch Itamar Marcus in his recent report and at a recent oral presentation at Tel Aviv University's Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies. In his paper entitled "Islam's Mandatory War Against Jews and Israel," Marcus documents Islamic holy leaders declaring Jews to be "the eternal enemies of Allah," and the killing of Jews to be Allah's will. Palestinian Media Watch monitors the Palestinian media and issues regular reports, which can be had by emailing [Rabbi Winston](mailto:RabbiWinston@pmediawatch.org).

"The Palestinians have redefined the conflict from one over borders, in which compromise may be a solution, into a religious war for Allah in which compromise is heretical," Marcus explains. Religious leaders in the Palestinian Authority who lead Friday services in mosques continuously emphasize the following eight points:

- Jews are the enemy of Allah
- The killing of a Jew is a religious obligation
- All agreements with Israel are temporary in nature
- Islam is fighting a religious war against the Jews
- Palestinians are the vanguard in this war against the Jews, but all of Islam is obligated to assist them
- All the of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea is Islamic trust and any Muslim who relinquishes his land is damned to hell
- Allah will replace Muslims who shirk their duty to fight Israel

- The ultimate destruction of Israel is a certainty

(Not quite the Seven Noachide Laws...)

Marcus notes a number of horrifying quotes straight from the mouths of Palestinian Authority religious leaders that make the above points, including the following: "We the Palestinian nation, our fate from Allah is to be the vanguard in the war against the Jews until the resurrection of the dead, as the prophet Muhammad said: "The resurrection of the dead will not arrive until you will fight the Jews and kill them." -- Dr. Muhammed Ibrahim Madi, Palestinian Television, 30 March 2001

"The Jews are the Jews... They are all liars. They are terrorists. Therefore it is necessary to slaughter them and murder them, according to the words of Allah. it is forbidden to have mercy in your hearts for the Jews in any place and in any land. Make war on them any place that you find yourself. Any place that you encounter them, kill them. Kill the Jews and those among the Americans that are like them. The Jews only understand might. Have no mercy on the Jews, murder them everywhere."-- The preacher Dr. Ahmed Yousuf Abu Halabiah, a member of the Palestinian Sharianic (Islamic religious law) Rulings Council, and Rector of Advanced Studies, the Islamic University, Palestinian Television, 13 October 2000

"Blessed is he who fights Jihad in the name of Allah, blessed is he who [goes on] raids in the name of Allah, blessed is he who dons a vest of explosives on himself or on his children and goes in to the depth of the Jews and says: Allahu Akbar, Blessed be Allah. Like the collapse of the building upon the heads of the Jews in their sinful dance-hall, I ask of Allah that we see the Knesset collapsing on the heads of the Jews." -- Dr. Muhammad Ibrahim Madi, Friday Sermon, Palestinian TV, June 8, 2001

"The Day of resurrection will not come without the victory of the believers over the descendants of the monkeys and pigs and with their annihilation." -- Sheikh Muhammed Abd Al Hadi La'afi, Responsible for Religious Teaching and Instruction in the Office of the Wakf in the official P.A. newspaper Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, 18, May 2001

Etc. Of course, there are a million more, and if you can't read Arabic, then you can read them on many of the Arab web sites that are graphically appealing and which lie through their teeth -- in English. We're just fooling ourselves, especially certain leaders, whose portfolios might as well read: Minister of Perpetuating False Dreams, or, Minister Of Pushing Off The Inevitable.

Alright, alright, so Moshiach DIDN'T come this Tisha B'Av. But the Palestinians did, and, if they and their counterparts are allowed to have it THEIR way (and we seem poised to let them have just that), then, know that Moshiach aint going to be much farther behind.

In the words of some great leaders of the past: Make sure your Shabbos suit is properly ironed.

MELAVE MALKAH: History And Beyond: Techiyas HaMeisim, continued...

History & Beyond

NOTE: The entire series of 'History & Beyond' that has been appearing in this slot on a weekly basis can now be found in entirety at: www.thirtysix.org. There is additional background and notes added as well.

Continuing on with last week's discussion, we have the following citation (paranetical remarks are mine):

... Whether talking about the dead or the exiled, they are being refined (burrur) continuously. That is why they (Men of the Great Assembly) established the blessing of 'Resurrection of the Dead' in the present tense (and not the future tense, as one would think). As well, "Redeems Israel" (the Fourth Blessing) is also in the present tense, as we mentioned earlier.

Nevertheless, redemption and the resurrection at this time is only on the level of p'nimius (inner, more spiritual level). Likewise, in the entire world, it is only happening on the level of p'nimius.

(In other words, the concepts of resurrection and redemption are not only concepts for the future, when they will become self-evident, that is, the Jewish exile will have come to an end, and, dead bodies will come back to life again from the ground. Rather, they are concepts that have reality even in the present, on a far more subtle, spiritual level. However, they are a proof and sample of what to expect in the future.)

It is similar to what we see with respect to souls. For, as it is known, all souls are the result of the refinement-separation of the Sparks which are constantly removed and elevated...

(We have spoken about the 'Holy Sparks' in a previous essay. In short, souls do not come from nothing, but, rather, from pre-existing spiritual entities referred to as 'Nitzutzei Kedushah' -- Holy Sparks. According to Kabbalah, until a Spark's time comes to enter a body as a soul, it remains immersed in a spiritually defiled reality called the 'K'lipos' -- Encasements -- and only elevated through certain, pre-determined spiritual means.)

... and through this, they gain more light and blessing from Above, and they become complete enough to become an independent soul that can come out in a body...

When a soul becomes merit-worthy through the learning of Torah and the doing of mitzvos, it leaves This World to enjoy the pleasure of Gan Aiden of G-d -- to take pleasure in the radiance of the Divine Presence, and to be bound up with the 'Rock of Life' (that is, G-d Himself).

(The learning of Torah and the performance of mitzvos is the ONLY way to achieve completion and earn closeness to G-d in the World-to-Come. It may take several lifetimes to achieve this, as the Arizal explains in Sha'ar HaGilgulim.)

Death of the righteous is their redemption for now, for, it frees them from all of the troubles of the yetzer hara; it is a level of resurrection because here they live in the darkness of the zuhama (indelible spiritual impurity since Adam's sin) and the clothing of the snake (that is, our physical bodies as they are now). There they are bound up with the Rock of Life.

However, this (redemption and resurrection) is on the level of the soul only, for, the body remains in the grave until the time of resurrection, even for completely righteous people, as it says in the Talmud (Shabbos 152b);

(In Chapter 37 of Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Rav Chaim Vital describes how the Arizal could see the Nefesh of righteous people over their grave sites, and even talk with them.)

redemption and resurrection is only on the level of the souls and not the bodies, in the p'nimius of the world which is Gan Aiden.

(Though Gan Aiden is taken to be a physical reality, which it was, it is, at its root, a spiritual reality in the Sefiros, which continues to exist even when the physical manifestation ceases to be noticeable.)

All of this is the refinement and rectification of the Sparks, from which the souls are drawn, as it all that exists and is renewed daily on the level of DTzCh"M continuously...

(DTzCh"M stands for: Domaim (Silent, i.e., the Mineral world), Tzomayach (Sprout, that is, Vegetation World), Chayah (Living; that is, Animal World), and, Medabehr (Speaking, that is, Man) -- the four levels of physical existence.)

It is their refinement and rectification for they leave the K'lipos and become the reality of this world. With respect to this, the blessings of ingathering (of the exiles, that is, the Sparks from within the K'lipos) and resurrection is in present tense. They refer to the constant separation and rectification of the Sparks.

However, the refinement and rectification is not yet complete, for, This World needs much rectification -- good and evil remain quite combined together and steeped in the zuhama and skin of the snake. Tikun will only occur through Torah, mitzvos, and the deeds of the righteous, as well as through the dinim (judgments) and the difficult world occurrences...

(The events of history, particularly the hardships are a negative alternative for achieving Tikun Olam -- World Rectification.)

However, the tikun is only after things return to their elements, just as a person's tikun doesn't really occur until after he dies, is buried, and decays in the ground. It is only then that the tikun of Torah and good deeds which he performed in This World can rectify him...

(We see that now, in spite of the Torah that we learn and the good deeds that we perform, it is difficult to change dramatically and permanently, at least not as much as one might assume who learns Torah and performs mitzvos. That is correct, for, the true and lasting effect of our Torah and

mitzvos will only be known after death, when we undergo our final rectifications.)

... or through the judgment and punishment of Gehinnom.

(If a person didn't learn sufficient Torah and do enough mitzvos to effect their eventual tikun, the Seven 'Furnaces' Gehinnom will take care of that.)

In any case, it won't happen until after death... Until the Chitzonios within a person return to the dust... (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 508-509)

B'ezras Hashem, next week, we will look at Year 6000 and onward.

Have a great Shabbos,
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