

# OUT & UP

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

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## Friday Night:

### Elul Zman

As of this Shabbos we will be two weeks into "Elul Zman." "Elul" refers to the Jewish month we are now in, and "zman" means "time." In the yeshivishe world, it refers to the short learning semester that begins on the first day of Elul, and ends with Rosh Hashanah.

Of course, Elul Zman means more than this. MUCH more. Starting from the first day of the month, we blow the shofar every day. Sephardim around the world begin saying Selichos," special prayers that beg G-d for forgiveness, and Ashkenazim will join them, this year, the week before Rosh Hashanah.

For the spiritually sensitive and halachically aware, the Day of Judgment is fast approaching, and they can feel it. And, we are MEANT to feel it, for as the Rambam explains, we blow the shofar to awaken us from our yearly slumber, to make us realize that teshuvah is necessary and fast.

The shofar has few functions, but many forms. There is the classical ram's-horn type, which makes that heart-penetrating, Biblical-type sound, which seems to have the ability to elevate the repentant person outside of his slice of time into the "Big Picture" -- G-d's purpose in creation and our role within it.

Then there is the "Hashgochah Pratis" type. Hashgochah Pratis means Divine Providence, and the events of our lives that are governed by Divine Providence can be their own wake-up call to teshuvah. Crises are very good at making us consider and reconsider what we are doing with our lives, and whether or not we are on the "right track."

For example, the terrorist attack a couple of weeks ago at the corner of King George and Jaffa streets, which killed fifteen people and wounded many others. I did not hear the bomb go off, though I was only blocks away at the time. However, I did see some of the aftermath and read the stories that followed in its wake.

The stories of the people who "just happened" to have been there that day at that moment, are astounding, or rather, frightening. And, the stories of the people who were on their way there, but were momentarily delayed for what may have seemed like the most trivial of reasons, are also scary in as much as one can see how close one can come to death without knowing it at the time.

And, the stories of how the people died...

It is a different Elul Zman this year. Last Elul, as we prepared for the upcoming Rosh Hashanah of 5761, we had no idea that just before Rosh Hashanah the Arab world would dive head first into a whole new Intifadah, and obliterate any hope of immediate peace, or peace at all. After the rock-throwing rampage from the Temple Mount Erev Rosh Hashanah, it was the first time since 1967 that the Western Wall was devoid of Jewish prayers on Rosh Hashanah.

The following Succos witnessed an uncharacteristic rainfall on the first day, and then another dry winter. However, nothing shocked the nation more than the butcherism of the people of Ramallah as they proudly and happily tore two Israeli soldiers to pieces with their bare hands. Who can forget the picture of the well-groomed Palestinian proudly displaying the Israeli blood on his hands for the excited crowd outside?

For a country dependent upon tourism, it was a kiss of death. Tourism has spiraled downward, forcing stores and others out of business, with no recovery in sight. More terrorism, more criticism from the world that just doesn't make sense, and countries that want to prosecute our prime minister for his indirect involvement while their leader gets world sympathy (and money) in spite of his DIRECT involvement in so much death and terrorism.

And, as if that wasn't maddening enough, a wedding hall collapses in Israel due to faulty construction, killing people and ruining lives for good. More recently, Jewish couples perish in a plane crash in America while taking a short break from the pressures of life. All over the world, from Australia to the United States, Jews are concerned and nervous like never before because anti-Semitism is clearly on the rise.

What does it mean? There seems to be three prevalent interpretations of our people in history. There are those who ignore it and go about business as usual, as if not looking means you can't be seen either. Then there are those who reason it is only a passing phase, and at most, an Israeli problem.

Finally, there are those who are suspicious that things have been getting progressively worse for the Jewish people because things are getting progressively worse for the Jewish people. And, they know when that happens, it means Heaven is pulling in the "leash," or, rather, yoke. All of a sudden in this new light, they see all the events of the past year, and indeed, the past decade, as part of one, long, extended shofar blast.

No one (I know) knows what's going to happen from this point onward, though the options are few.

But, whatever notes emanate out from the shofar of Divine Providence, they will all say the same thing in the end. Jewish destiny beckons its people. It is time to rise out of our technologically advanced, but spiritually limited period of time and read the writing on the proverbial wall.

If you can read, then read it, and teach it to others. If you can't read it, then learn how. History and the nations of the world, particularly the Arab population is making us do things we should have done on our own. They are forcing us to do that which we should have willingly done without instigation. As the rabbis teach, "G-d has many messengers;" as history proves, not all of them are friendly.

Rosh Hashanah 5762 is fast approaching, and it has the potential to be the most powerful one of all of history. Or, it can be just like all the others, which, at this late and treacherous stage of Jewish history isn't enough. The choice is ours to make, or to avoid. But, in ALL cases, the consequences are OURS, all of ours, no matter in which corner of the world a Jew lives.

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## Shabbos Day:

*When a man will take a wife . . . (Devarim 24:1)*

One of the many mitzvos in this week's parshah is the one to get married. From the posuk itself, it sounds like a very simple process: man SEES woman, man WANTS woman, man TAKES woman.

However, from the Oral Law (Kiddushin 2a-b), we know that a Jewish marriage is far from being a simple matter, and, anyone who has ever been involved with an Orthodox marriage knows how precise we are about the many details and intricacies to make sure that the Chasan and Kallah (Groom and Bride) have a "kosher" marriage -- joyful and full of honor for one another -- but above all, Halachically kosher.

Not every marriage works out, obviously. In fact, within the same posuk the Torah writes:

. . . then he must write her a bill of divorce . . .

Thus, there is also a MITZVAH to get divorced when the marriage ceases to fulfill halachic requirements, which much must be decided on by the Bais Din which is chosen to issue the "Get." And, just as the marriage was to take place in a halachic manner and with honor for one another, so, too, must the divorce be executed in accordance to halachah, and, with respect for one another.

In theory it might make sense, but the everyday reality of divorce tells a different story. There may have been attraction and love for one another in the beginning, at least on some level, but, that is usually replaced with just the opposite emotions and feelings: hatred, disgust, disrespect, resentment, etc.

When that is the case, then, the very halachic device that was granted by Heaven to free the spouses of one another so that they can try again with a more suitable mate, becomes a device for imprisonment. It is more common for a woman to become an "Iguna," but however, I also know of stories where the man is the one who is being held "captive" by the woman until she gets the settlement -- or the revenge -- that she is seeking.

Either way it is tragic, and many rabbis have spent days locked up in their studies looking for ways to halachically free the woman of her disgruntled husband, who obviously lacks sufficient fear of G-d to what is right. In some cases it may yield positive results, in other cases, it may result in a lonely wait and years of battling.

In the days when the Jewish people enjoyed Torah sovereignty, the Talmud explains, there was a way to compel the man to give the Get he was obligated to give. Today, aside from some vigilante squads that work under cover, the Bais Din has few options at its disposal to enforce their decision on behalf of the husband or the wife.

One of the most amazing things of the entire thing is how people can get married with such confidence, with the firm belief that this is their real "zivug" (soul-mate), and yet months or years later, become "enemies" of one another. In my limited involvement of such cases, and after seeing how the husband abuses the wife, or she him, or both abuse each other, one can't help but wonder how they ever got married in the first place!

In some cases, either one or both spouses were not mentally well (not that any of us are 100% there either); in such circumstances, the marriage was "iffy" from the start. However, in other cases, the spouses appeared to be more than well enough to make the marriage work, yet they turned into marital monsters along the way.

In some cases, a kind of marital schizophrenia sets in when the couple appears to be having an okay time of it in public, whereas behind closed doors the walls of marriage are privately crumbling at a quick rate. However, it doesn't take long before what is happening on the inside begins to appear on the outside as well, and without the proper counseling, salvation may become impossible.

Marriage is very risky business. In a business deal, one can lose money -- a lot of money, and even one's possessions, G-d forbid. However, such losses do not compare to the losses that souls suffer when the spouses and the little, innocent children born to the parents undergo a painful divorce. However, few people think of THAT in the big rush to get married and have as many children as possible and as fast as possible.

One married individual with children once confided in me:

"You know, when I stood under the Chupah, I thought I was marrying a perfect woman. And, when we spoke about our future children, we spoke of having righteous children. I suppose that she thought that she was marrying a perfect man. Admittedly at the time, there were a few more things

to fix up, but as far as I was concerned, we were heading for the perfect marriage."

He paused and then continued, "after one year of marriage though, it seemed as if we were heading instead for the divorce court. And not too long after that, the children came, and what we had hoped would help bring us closer together instead only added more tension . . ."

"So what changed?" I asked him, seeing what now appeared to be a good, strong marriage with good children. I was afraid he was going to tell me it was all an illusion.

"I did." He said. "It didn't happen over night, that's for sure, and I still have plenty of work left to do. However, I've sobered up about life and marriage. I've seen the depths of my 'other side' . . . I know how mean I can be . . . how impatient . . . and how selfish. I have said and done things that disgust me to this very day . . ."

Curious about what he was referring to, I didn't need to ask. I had my own personal examples.

"I've come to realize that marriage is not a 'two-way street', like I argued for years . . . many painful years. I have come to understand, thank G-d, that marriage is about two 'one-way' streets, where each person thinks of the other person FIRST without any expectation of return. Marriage is not a partnership where responsibilities are divided by percentages, and you sue when the other person does a little less than you had expected that day."

"No," he was concluding, "the day I swallowed my pride and started this new approach was the day I became proud of how selfless I could be. And unknowingly, it was also the day that my wife began to trust me that I really cared for her well-being, and she began to take care of me in ways I would never have expected. It took about a decade, but we were finally having joy from our marriage, and now we're trying to teach all of this to our children."

One posuk, two extremes, but the choice is ours.

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## **SEUDAH SHLISHIS:**

*Remember what Amalek did to you along your way when you left Egypt. (Devarim 25:18)*

Amalek is like a red light and siren. Being the nemesis of the Jewish people, when he shows up in the Torah and history, as he does at the end of this week's parshah, then there is usually something very important to learn.

For example, the warning of Amalek and the mitzvah to remember what he did to us comes immediately after the mitzvah to have fair and just weights when doing business. The lesson for the generations: cheating in business indicates a lack of faith in G-d to provide for your needs, which results in a spiritual void into which Amalek jumps.

There is a similar message much earlier in the Torah, as the Talmud points out. The Talmud says:

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: Had the Jewish people kept the first Shabbos, no nation or language could have had any power [over the Jewish people], as it says, "It was on the seventh day that the people went out to collect . . ." (Shemos 16:27), and after that it writes, "And Amalek came . . ." (Shemos 17:8). (Shabbos 118b)

The Talmud is referring to some of the Jewish people, in spite of Moshe's instruction to the contrary, went out on Shabbos looking for mann. This was considered a violation of the Shabbos, and shortly after that, the people of Amalek came and attacked the Jewish people for the first time in history.

The Talmud is revealing a life-saving insight: Emunah (Faith in G-d) and Amalek represent two polar extremes of one conceptual continuum. For, keeping the Shabbos and fair business practices represent one's level of faith in G-d - not just that He will provide us with what we need, but that He is always THERE always paying attention to every last detail of our lives.

This doesn't necessarily mean that you won't lose the business deal by ceasing from deal-making on Shabbos, or that you will have enough customers every day to make up for what you could have cheated out of a customer. It doesn't mean that doing mitzvos in This World will always land us on our feet.

What DOES it mean then? It means that, whatever happens to us in our lifetimes, and whatever we see happen to others in their lifetimes, is for good - our good and their good - IN THE END.

The Talmud tells a couple of stories of Nachum Ish Gamzu, whose name derived from the way he addressed all situations with the phrase, "Gam zu l'tovah" - -- this too is for the good.

And it was as he said. For, once he brought money and valuables as a gift to the Caesar, to "inspire" him to abandon his decree against the Jewish people. While on the way, he stayed over night at a small inn, and was robbed of the Jewish gift to the Caesar. The innkeeper took the gold and silver from the trunk, and replaced it with sand.

Unknowingly, Nachum brought the trunk filled with sand to the Caesar, who upon seeing what was in place of the money, gold and silver, became even more infuriated, believing that the Jewish people were mocking him. Nachum only said, "This too is for the good."

Just then, Eliyahu showed up as a Roman guard, and informed the Caesar of how Nachum's ancestor, Avraham Avinu, used such sand to conquer the kings of Canaan against whom he was at war. The Caesar used the sand in a protracted war he could not win until then, and a miracle occurred and the Romans won the war.

As a reward for Nachum's mystical sand, the Caesar let Nachum take the decree, and more valuables than which with he had first arrived. As Nachum had trusted, it had all worked out just fine for him and the Jewish people.

Then there was the time that Nachum Ish Gamzu was riding on a donkey when he was met by a poor and famished man who begged for food. Nachum told him to wait a moment while he dismounted to help him, but by the time he reached the ground, the man had already died.

Nachum was broken by what had occurred, and he threw himself onto the man and cursed every limb of his own body for not having responded to the needs of the beggar.

The curse came true, and all Nachum could do when his distraught students came to visit him was lie on his bed in agony, completely handicapped. But, it was his students who mourned, and not him, "Rebi! How can we see you like this?!"

"My dear students," Nachum Ish Gamzu replied, "Better you should see me like this now in This World, than what I would look like in the World-to-Come if I didn't go through this now."

And that is the way he died, completely lame, in agony, but completely full of emunah - with belief in G-d's master plan and the ultimate goodness of it. He may have lost his body, which is temporal at best, however, he won the war against Amalek, who comes to undermine our faith in Eternity and G-d's master plan, and that is ETERNAL.

It is a simple equation, though hard to remember and implement: the more faith, the less Amalek; the less faith, the more Amalek. It seems that current history is giving us plenty of opportunities to test it out.

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## **MELAVE MALKAH:**

### **History & Beyond: 6000 & Beyond**

To remain with an old analogy, imagine taking water vapor and cooling it down. The result would be water. Now, if you were to cool the water even more to zero degrees Celsius, the water would adjust its molecular structure even more, crystallize, and become ice. Compared to the water vapor the H<sub>2</sub>O molecules once produced, the ice is in the most "physical" state of all.

However, if you were to reverse the procedure and increase the temperature, eventually the ice would begin to melt, and become fluid water once again. If you were to increase the temperature of the water to 100 degrees Celsius or more, the water would begin to boil and return to a vapor state, becoming invisible to the eye.

As the light of Ain Sof moved away from its Source into the "Hollow," it became more physical. Now, in such a discussion as this, as in all of Kabbalah, everything is relative. Compared to what was to come, the light was extremely non-physical. However, compared to higher, less filtered levels of the same light, the light was "more physical."

This is why the First Man, before he sinned, had skin that was translucent like our finger nails, which

incidentally, we remind ourselves of at Havdallah on Motzei Shabbos when we use the light of the fire to view our fingernails. Physical food and physical digestion were unnecessary, for Adam HaRishon, on his pre-sin level, received his life-sustaining Holy Sparks directly from G-d through creation. Just like Moshe after he came down the mountain with "horns of light." It was the "vapor" stage of mankind.

Furthermore, on such a level, becoming "one flesh" with one's wife was not physically impossible, but easy to do since the skin resembled light more than it did physical and obstructing flesh. Rashi's pshat of such human unification taking place only through the children is a post-sin consequence, and obviously has many shortcomings, as the reality of divorce proves.

However, the consequence of sinning, as G-d had warned man, was to force the light to descend even more so, and result in even greater physicality. This is represented, Kabbalistically, by our physical skin, also called the "skin of the snake." And, once man became more physical and limited, so did the rest of creation, forcing us to have to eat physical food and physically digest it, all part of the process of Tikun Olam - fixing up the mistake that Adam made.

To make use of another analogy, we have the computer. Unlike the original typewriter, when I press on a certain key on my keyboard, it does not result in that specific key hitting the paper and typing the letter of my choice. Instead, when I press a key, an electric signal is sent to my hard drive that reads it as an instruction to produce the form of the chosen letter on my screen. It is really quite a remarkable process, one that is duplicated when my computer goes to print that letter on actual paper.

I don't speak in computer language, nor do I understand it. And my computer doesn't speak English, nor does it understand me. However, some geniuses who understand both of us got together and developed a way to use computer technology and language to translate my will into the reality it dictates (most of the time, except when it rebels, or at least seems to). The more elegant the system and the language, the better it can facilitate the will of man.

The Sefiros work in a similar fashion. They are a system that G-d employs to translate HIS will into OUR reality, so that creation can interact with us, and we, with it, and through it all, earn our portion in the World-to-Come. And depending on the command of G-d, a certain sefirah is activated to provide a certain effect at precisely a certain time in a precise way.

Just as with the computer, there can be a chain of command where one signal triggers another, and so on until the intention of the typist is executed. So too, does one sefirah give light over to another, until the light reaches its Divinely intended and final destination. The more conductors the electrical current has to pass through a computer, the weaker the signal. The more sefiros the light passes through, the weaker, the more physical the light.

In Moshiach's time, may it be soon in our time, the lower sefiros begin to move in the opposite direction from whence they originally came, upward, and with them, human reality. Therefore, the



light that will sustain us will have less sefiros through which to travel, and therefore, it will be less filtered. That is why evil will and must cease to exist, just as darkness is banished with the introduction of light.

Digest that over Shabbos, and G-d willing, we will continue next week.

Have a great Shabbos,  
Pinchas Winston

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