

JOURNEY FROM EGYPT TO THE WORLD-TO-COME

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

17th of Tamuz

Last Sunday was the seventeenth day of Tammuz -- 'Shivah Asar b'Tammuz' -- and the fast day that begins 'The Three Weeks' (though you will read this on another day). Having left the Sefirah-Period just six weeks ago, we are now into a whole new even more serious period of national mourning called 'Bein HaMetzrim' -- 'Between the Troubles' -- that is, the period BETWEEN (and including) THE TROUBLES of Shivah Asar b'Tammuz and Tisha B'Av.

The summer is usually considered a time of life, at least in the Western World. It is when people come alive, leave school early, leave work early, and go to the beach, to the ball game, to the barbecue, or, whatever they can do to PHYSICALLY enjoy themselves. Hot and sunny weather and a much 'looser' atmosphere make modesty a forgotten value (although winters are not much better these days), and, if ever there was one word to sum up peoples' notions of what summer should be all about, it is the word F-u-n -- with a capital F.

I said leave school early, but I only meant with respect to the Orthodox system of education, which usually continues well into the summer long after secular schools have closed in June. Cheder and yeshivah do not usually finish until just before Tisha B'Av, after which time they take what is called, ironically, the 'Chofesh HaGadol' -- the 'Big Vacation.'

Well, 'big' at least compared to other periods of time away from yeshivah, but not big at all compared to their secular counterparts. For, within three weeks of Tisha B'Av, the yeshivah world will return to learn once again with the beginning of the Jewish month of Elul (August 19), and commence a VERY serious period of time called 'Elul Zman' -- a period of repentance and preparation for the upcoming Yomei Norayim -- Days of Awe (i.e., Rosh Hashanah, Ten Days of Repentance, and, Yom Kippur).

For some Orthodox children, it is simply what they are used to. For those who continue to remain in the yeshivah world, even after they are married, it is the requirement of being part of that world. And, for an even smaller group, they love learning Torah so much that it is vacation as long as they are learning, and, 'work' once the vacation begins (nothing is more difficult and complicated than

keeping children entertained day-after-day when they are out of school).

What can we Orthodox Jews do? Couldn't G-d have let the temples be destroyed in the winter time, when there's not much to do anyhow? We have so many holidays as it is that we have to observe, and which don't always allow for 'fun' -- couldn't THIS period of mourning have overlapped with THAT period of mourning, and killed two birds with one stone? What does history have against us, anyhow?

Let me answer this question by a story.

There was once an Orthodox Jew who was on his way back to Eretz Yisroel from the States, obviously anxious to get home and rejoin with his also anxious wife and children. He got as far as boarding the airplane and settling in for the long flight when an attendant came and told him that he would have to deplane.

You can imagine the disappointment, and anger. No reason, apology, or, compensation the stewardess offered for this unusual and embarrassing circumstance could placate the man, who refused to leave the plane. He simply wanted to go home to his family and country.

Thus, airline security was called in, and, the Orthodox Jew, forcibly and in humiliation was removed from the airplane in front of all the other passengers fortunate to remain on board for the flight. The plane took off shortly thereafter, with the Orthodox Jew left behind at New York's Kennedy Airport waiting for the next available flight to take him home.

However, all the disappointment, anger, humiliation, and impatience disappeared when he first became aware of the shocking news that the flight he had boarded -- he had actually been ON that the plane itself -- and then unboarded crashed into the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Canada shortly after take-off, with no survivors.

Within a split moment of consciousness, the Orthodox Jew went from being the 'victim' to being the 'saved.' In fact, any humiliation he had felt at that time probably stemmed from realizing how G-d was going out of His way, so-to-speak, to save his life, and yet he had resisted and responded with VERY negative emotions.

I don't know if the man had ever pronounced those key words that we are ALL obligated to say in times of trouble -- This TOO is for the good -- but, he certainly had reason to know that he should have shortly after HIS troubles had begun.

So it is with the life of the Jew. This World has so much good to offer -- PHYSICALLY. However, whatever that good is, it pales infinitely compared to the good that the World-to-Come has to offer us FOREVER, whether we can relate to that good or not. There's nothing wrong with a little fun in life, except, that is, when it comes at the cost of pleasure, pleasure in This World, and, especially in the World-to-Come.

For, whereas fun stimulates the bodily senses for a temporary period of time, pleasure is that which we gain from doing something meaningful, even though it may also result in fun (like spending time with your small children, for example). And, there is nothing more meaningful than the pleasure of the World-to-Come, which, is hard to focus on and work towards when you're constantly be drawn into superficial secular summer activities.

Against us? FOR us. Whether it is history (i.e., Hashgochah Pratis -- Divine Providence), or, the rabbis interpretation of history, either way, they help us to keep control of spiritual senses and remain focussed on what counts most in life. While the rest of the world is running around living a care-free life, history and the rabbis have made sure that we live a caring life, one that takes into account the ultimate pleasure of the World-to-Come. This way, eventually and as a result, such an attitude will lead to redemption, when we will be able to turn such fast days as Shivah Asar b'Tammuz and Tisha B'Av into days of celebration and meaningful joy.

Shabbos Day:

Parashas Mattos

When the land will be conquered before G-d, and only afterwards (you will) return, then you will 'clean' from G-d and from Israel... (Bamidbar 32:22)

In the parshah, this posuk is talking about the people of Reuven and Gad, who had come to Moshe requesting land on the east side of the Jordan River. After Moshe criticized them for this decision, he later made them take a vow that they would only do so after fighting with their brothers against the people of Canaan, and, after waiting for the land to be settled. If they did this, Moshe told them, then they would be 'clean' of all obligations.

However, the Talmud, in typical Talmudic fashion, has another application for these very same words:

It was taught: The overseer of charity, if there are no poor to whom to distribute, should exchange (bronze coins for longer lasting silver coins) with others, but not with himself. An overseer of food for whom there are no poor should sell to others but not to himself, as it says, "You will be clean from G-d and from Israel." (Pesachim 13a)

The Talmud is talking about preserving tzedakah until it can be properly used. Bronze coins, Rashi explains, can rust over time and lose their value, whereas silver maintains itself for a longer period of time. How much more so is this the case with food, and, by selling supplies now, the money can be saved for a time when needy people are around to be helped.

However, the Talmud says, it is hard not to be biased when it comes to one's own possessions. And, since people know this, it is even hard, perhaps, not to wonder if the overseer has decided in his own favor when making the exchange of bronze for silver, or, food for money. Therefore, even though the onlooker has his own mitzvah to judge to the side of merit (Shabbos 127b), and, is even warned of the consequence of not doing so (Shabbos 127a), still, nevertheless, the Talmud is teaching, one has an obligation to make it easy for people to judge him or her to the side of merit by appearing 'clean' for G-d AND man.

Appearing clean before G-d is rarely an issue: either you are or you aren't, and G-d knows it even better than we do. You can fool some of the people some of the time (including yourself), but, you can fool G-d NONE of the time, so, why bother trying?

Now, obviously we are not talking about doing the wrong thing and making it appear as if you are doing the right thing for appearance sake, for, then you will not be clean before G-d. No, we are talking about doing the right thing in a way that might make people think you are doing the wrong thing, even though you aren't.

This is different from the rabbinic prohibition of 'ma'aris ayin' (literally, 'appearance of the eye'), which is when you are doing the right thing, though it appears as if you are doing the wrong thing, which people take to be the right thing. In such an instance, they can actually learn to do the wrong thing from you, because they don't know what is right or wrong, except by the way you have acted.

However, here the assumption is that they DO know what is right and what is wrong, and, they think they have caught you doing the wrong thing! And, what's wrong with that? Worse come to worst, they will criticize you for doing the wrong thing, at which time you will have your chance to explain your actions.

Or, they won't. And, instead, they will judge you unfavorably, and you will have been a stumbling block for them, which is a Torah prohibition (Vayikra 19:14). Or, maybe even worse, people will say, "Well, if So-and-so isn't so careful about that, then certainly I can be more lenient in what I do..." which, of course, is faulty reasoning, for which you will also be held responsible.

Therefore, in all that we do, we have to be clean before G-d and before man -- squeaky clean, if we can. If G-d sees that we try to be, then, He helps make it so for us, even if we slip up every now and then.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Parashas Massei

These are the journeys of the Children of Israel, who left Egypt as legions under the leadership of Moshe and Aharon. (Bamidbar 33:1)

In the course of the forty years that the Jewish people first left the previously inescapable borders of Egypt, a lot had happened. In fact, a lot of Jews had died.

First, there were the Jews who were killed over the incident of the golden calf by the tribe of Levi when Moshe set about purifying the camp from idol worship. There were several plagues against other sinners through the four decades, and, some were even given capital punishment for the crimes they had performed.

In the incident of the daughters of Midian alone at the end of Parashas Balak, 176,000 Jews died for worshipping Ba'al Pe'or! In fact, as Sefer Bamidbar winds down with this week's parshah, the entire generation of men who had fallen for the words of the spies will be coming to an end, as the last of the sinners die for to atone for their involvement.

As well, many people were born in the desert. In spite of the heavy losses, the overall number of the Jewish people stayed pretty much the same. Some people never even left Egypt, at least in the own bodies, or, in the 'outside world.' Where do they fit into this posuk above?

Thus, there is tremendous insight in the first verse of this week's parshah. There are three parts to the verse: 1.) Children of Israel, 2.) who left Egypt, and, 3.) under the leadership of Moshe and Aharon, and each one tells a story of its own.

First of all, 'Children of Israel' includes all Jews, whether they were born in Egypt or in the desert, whether they died before reaching Eretz Yisroel, or, whether they died in the desert. However, what determined who survived and made it in the end was whether they were able to 'leave Egypt,' and, accept the leadership of Moshe and Aharon.

For, as we learned from the wife of Lot, there is 'leaving' and then there is 'leaving.' There is a leaving where the heart goes with you, and, then there is the kind of leaving that Lot's wife did where her body fled from S'dom while her heart remained behind. Only those Jews whose hearts came with them, leaving any desire to remain in Egypt back in Egypt, qualified to enjoy redemption.

But, even then, if they could not accept Moshe's leadership, as in the case of Korach and the spies before him, then, still, they were bound to stumble and get left behind either in Egypt or the desert. Whatever journeys they were to take, they would be different from that of the rest of the Jewish nation.

As it was for the Jews of the Desert, so, too, is for the Jews of any century and period of Jewish history. Yes, we are ALL Children of Israel. However, to travel through time and succeed at making it to the 'Promised Land,' literally or figuratively, we must be willing to leave Egypt, either literally or figuratively. That means leaving behind values that are anti-Torah and which promote immorality on any level.

Furthermore, we have to be willing to accept the guidance and leadership of the Moshes and Aharons of our time frame, Torah leaders who abide by ALL the laws of Torah, and who are famous

for their great Torah knowledge and fear of G-d. Then we will possess leaders who will be willing to lead us TO G-d, and not away from Him, leaders whom we can follow, not whom we try to lead.

With these three qualifications, a Jew can make his own personal journey through life and history successfully, leaving behind his own version of Egyptian 'enslavement' and arriving safely at his own portion of the Promised Land. This is what gives us the fortitude to withstand life's spiritual tests, and to come out of them being pleasing to G-d, ourselves, and, our fellow man.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Techiyas HaMeisim-Resurrection Of The Dead

The leap from Yemos HaMoshiach to the period of Techiyas HaMeisim (Resurrection of the Dead) is far greater than the leap from our period of history to Yemos HaMoshiach. For, whereas in Yemos HaMoshiach new bodies will be brought into the world through the familiar birth process, in Techiyas HaMeisim they will be built anew just like Adam HaRishon's body was at the beginning of Parashas Bereishis:

... It is like a craftsman who extracts silver from its source in the ground; in the beginning he puts it into an oven until all the impurities of the ground are removed, and the silver remains. But not perfect silver, until he puts it into the over again Likewise, The Holy One, Blessed is He, puts the body into the ground until it completely rots and all of the zuhama is removed, and only a small amount of decomposed matter remains. From this He re-builds the body... (Zohar, Vayaira 115b-116a)

What this means is that at the beginning, He will build the body from the small amount of decomposed matter, which will be clean and pure from zuhama. However, it will still be quite physical and not in its true perfected state. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 490)

Thus, the purpose of resurrection is clear: it is to rebuild the body free of any impurities, so that it can return to its ideal state of 'Kesones Ohr' (aleph-vav-raish), when it is more soul-like than body-like. How long this process takes is the same for every person, however, just when the process begins will vary from person to person:

In any case, the time of resurrection will vary, for, one who is rectified earlier from his zuhama will die and resurrect earlier, since the point of death then will only be to decay the physicality of the body and renew it as a new entity. As a result, the period of death to resurrection for the entire 'generation' will be long, though, tzaddikim who have died previously will resurrect immediately at the beginning of the period, which will be after forty years of the ingathering of the exiles (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 489)

This is what it says in Midrash:

There will be many resurrections, and the period of time will continue, according to Rebi Yehudah from forty years after Kibbutz Golios, at which time the first resurrection will occur, and continue until

the last resurrection, a period of 210 years. Rebi Yitzchak says: 214 years. (Midrash Ne'elam, Toldos 140a)

Explains the Leshem: there will be many resurrections over a large period of time, with the first resurrection occurring after forty years of ingathering of exiles, that is, 210 years in advance of Year 6000. The last resurrection will occur towards the end of the 210 years:

They will not all die at the same time, for, the world will not be destroyed in advance of Techiyas HaMeisim. Rather, some will die early, and some later, just as it is now. It will continue this way for a long time-the entire forty-year period of Kibbutz Golios until the first resurrection, as well as the entire 210 years or 214 years after the first resurrection until the last resurrection, as we mentioned previously. Anyone who is not yet rectified by the time resurrection begins as is fitting for eternal life, will die at the end. (Sha'arei Leshem, 490)

Hence, during the period of 210 years, some people will have already resurrected, whereas others will still await death, decomposition, and, resurrection. However, whereas on this side of history we fear death and long to live, on THAT side of history we will long to finally die and be recreated anew:

All those who still live the life of This World will say 'Holy!' before the righteous who have already arisen during the resurrection. The world will exist on two levels: that of angels and that of man. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 490)

In such a spiritually holy environment, it will be impossible to ignore one's own physicality, and, the sooner one dies, the sooner one will be able to join the ranks of the angels.

Many questions arise as a result of the concept of resurrection, since it represents the 'final form' of the person (though it can become increasingly spiritual as time progresses and creation becomes more elevated). However, when we consider the concept of 'gilgulim, that is, reincarnation, then the question arises, which body returns in Techiyas HaMeisim?

After all, reincarnation implies that a single soul can live many lives. And, furthermore, in the course of living many lives, he may have had many wives, and she, many husbands-one per lifetime. For whom do we resurrect?

The answer is not so simple, and, it is beyond the scope of this discussion to fully provide it, even if that were possible. However, some details are available, beginning with:

Look also in the Zohar (Chaye Sarah 126a), where it says that the resurrection will literally occur ... in the body that suffered with the soul in This World and did not derive any pleasure from the entire Torah and his good deeds ... after it is purified from all its zuhama and physicality, as a result of death and decomposition in the ground, as it is explained. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 489)

Thus, according to the Leshem, the body that was used the most to learn Torah and to perform mitzvos, with the least amount of worldly benefit for doing so, is the one destined to be resurrected.

Considering that Torah and mitzvos themselves are meant to act as a process of refinement, that would make sense.

And, the less worldly benefit derived for learning Torah and doing mitzvos would mean that the person did both for altruistic reasons, adding to the purification process of the body. For, nothing purifies the body more than serving G-d for HIS sake, and not for our own sake; it is considered as if the person sacrificed himself on the altar as a sacrifice to G-d and ascended Heavenward.

However, as we will see from the Arizal, it is not so simple which body returns in Techiyas HaMeisim, or, for that matter, how many.

CHAZAK!

Have a great Shabbos,
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