

OF SHOWERS, TOWERS, AND FALSE POWERS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

The world was corrupt before G-d, and the land was filled with violence. G-d saw that the world was corrupt, and that all flesh across the land had perverted its ways. (Bereishis 6:11-12)

By the time mankind reached its 1,656th birthday, it had ceased to justify its existence, having descended to its lowest possible moral level. The descent had begun with Adam HaRishon's sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil against G-d's expressed command, and continued until the rains washed away the last of mankind, save for Noach and his family.

When one wants to fathom the depth of the international sin that could lead to such Heavenly retribution, one might consider how much modern day society has again strayed from the fulfillment of the purpose of creation, and yet, has remained intact. It must be that we haven't come close to the level of evil that existed then, otherwise, wouldn't G-d have put His Divine foot down (upon us) by now?

Not necessarily so. First of all, until the very last moment, the skies of Babylonia remained cloudless, and the ground, very, very dry. The day the rains fell and the waters began to surge from below had started out like just any other day -- even better. No one could sense, not even Noach and his family, that such total destruction was coming that very same day and could happen so quickly.

In fact, as Rashi points out in Parashas Aikev, the Generation of the Flood had something going for it that we don't:

You will perish quickly (Devarim 11:17)

"(Says G-d,) I will give you no respite. But, if you ask, Was not respite given to the Generation of the Flood, as it says, 'His days shall be 120 years'?" The answer is, the Generation of the Flood had no one to learn from, but, you have someone from whom to learn!" (Rashi)

To what does Rashi refer? Rashi lived in the Dark Ages, when books, if they existed, had to be copied by hand, which, raised questions about authenticity and reliability. Yet, there was more than enough of a tradition even at that time to make knowledge of Torah not only possible, but, expected. In this respect, G-d is less patient with us than He was with the Generation of the Flood, and therefore, their

sin had to be awfully bad to bring about world destruction.

Now, fast forward about 1,000 years, to a period of history during which books and information are about as common as breathing and just as easy to acquire. And, if cost was an issue in the past, well, then, the Internet has taken care of that by making unbelievable amounts of Torah available for just about no cost. Torah for all kinds of Jews, Jews on all levels of learning.

Halachically, there is a term "tinok v'nishbah," which means "captured children" and refers to Jewish children who were raised by non-Jews without knowing they were Jewish. Obviously, without such knowledge, such children cannot be expected to accomplish too much Jewishly, and, it takes a lot of Divine Providence to reveal to them who they really are.

Many have applied this term to secular Jews today, who, given the confusion of our times, have much difficulty seeing Torah Judaism for what it is. In some cases, their intellectual clarity has been taken "hostage" by a Torah-hostile society, so-to-speak, and therefore, their Torah responsibility, theoretically, has become limited.

However, on the other hand, as Rashi points out, and how much more so must this be true in our generation today, availability of Torah itself is an obligating factor. In fact, for all we know, and it makes a lot of sense to say so, the rapidly increasing availability of Torah-true Judaism may be G-d's way of creating a "last chance" for countless Jews just in advance of Moshiach's arrival.

During this time of tremendous political upheaval regarding the Jewish people, it is something to seriously consider.

Shabbos Day:

Then they said, "Let's build a city, with a tower whose top will reach into Heaven. We'll make for ourselves a name" (Bereishis 11:4)

The "they," of course, is the Generation of the Dispersion, and, the "tower" is, of course, Migdal Bavel, the infamous Tower of Babel. In the Torah, their story is a short one, with long ramifications, reaching until this very day. They sound like a bunch of ambitious and foolish children, thinking they can build a tower that can reach to Heaven and challenge G-d's authority! Indeed, of this generation, it says:

"The people of the Generation of the Dispersion were completely evil and only wanted to fulfill the whims of the hearts for evil, and had no desire to bind themselves at all to Him, May His Name Be Blessed" (Hakdamos v'Sha'arim, Sha'ar 7, Chapter 6:5)

Nothing new. Mankind continues to buck its responsibility and relationship to its Creator, ridiculously unafraid to bite the hand that feeds it, like children who forcibly talk back to their parents, as if their parents can't wreak havoc on their lives! But they weren't simply babbling fools, as the above quote

finishes:

" Being very knowledgeable people for the sake of evil, they knew quite well that all the power of Beriyah was from the Malchus of Atzilus, and that all that occurred was based upon the inner light, unique to Above, which, in essence, is the light of Torah. Therefore, they desired to separate her from Above, and make use of her power in a non-Torah way; it was their intention to separate the Malchus from Zehr Anpin, to draw her to them into the city and the tower which they built. This is the secret meaning of what it says: We will go up to Heaven and wage war (Sanhedrin 109a) they wanted to forcibly "take" the Malchus from Zehr Anpin and to draw her to them, and therefore, they wanted to build a city and a tower precisely equal to the measure of the Malchus."

In other words, these evil people knew how to use Kabbalah to manipulate the Sefiros -- the spiritual channels through which the light of G-d makes its way from Him to us, in order from creation to exist and function.

It is not unlike in the world of chemistry. After thousands of years of living on this planet, often subject to the conditions of daily life, mankind finally developed the ability to break down the physical make-up of various aspects of creation, right down to a sub-atomic level. As a result, he has also been able to create situations that alter the state of molecules in order to produce man-made results to suit the needs of society, be those needs good or evil.

Even DNA, the foundation of individualized physical life, has been discovered and analyzed, and, for the first time in history, we are dealing with the moral implications of "genetic tampering." The implications of such technological advancement are astounding -- astoundingly good and astoundingly evil. And, society simply advances forward without much second thought about what G-d thinks about all of it, and, with very little fear of Divine retribution.

It works the same way in the spiritual world as well, in the realm of the Sefiros. Every aspect of existence is the direct and automatic result of specific Sefiros that are, at that time, functioning in a specific way. Different combinations of Sefiros result in altered states in the spiritual and physical world within which we live.

They can be manipulated. "Practical Kabbalah" teaches how to use the various Names of G-d, and, their many permutations, to create man-made miracles. Even just our daily actions and intentions have a dramatic impact on the Sefiros and the outcome in our world Below, whether people believe it or not; how much more so if you know what you are doing with Names of G-d which directly guide the Sefiros.

Today, if anyone knows how to perform such miracles, they don't do so for fear of the major damage that can result with even small mistakes, just like in the "lab." According to tradition, Rebi Akiva hid the keys to "Practical Kabbalah," which, will only return to us in the time of Moshiach, G-d willing.

However, according to tradition, the generations of the Flood and the Dispersion knew Practical

Kabbalah, and how to use it to accomplish their deceptive goals. But, as they found out, and, how we always find out, free-will has its limits; we can only abuse G-d's world so much before He descends and carries out corrective measures to put mankind and history back on track.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Cush fathered Nimrod, and he began to be powerful in the land. He was a great trapper before G-d, [and] thus was born the expression, "Like Nimrod, a great hunter before G-d." (Bereishis 10:8-10)

How did they -- the Generation of the Dispersion -- actually plan to manipulate the spiritual world to satisfy the selfish plans of their hearts? The answer to this question is that, the Generation of the Dispersion were experts in using the Holy Names. They knew how use the Names of The Holy One, Blessed is He, and Kabbalah Maysios (Practical Kabbalah), to draw down the "power" for the sake of idol worship.

The main expert in being able to use the Names to impose oaths on angels, each angel according to the Name that controls it, was Nimrod, as it says, "He was a great trapper before G-d." In other words, Nimrod was able to "trap" and bring down the forces through using the Names of The Holy One, Blessed is He.

So, even though on a pshat level, it seems as if Nimrod was your everyday run-of-the-mill trapper of game and bounty, the truth was, he was much more than this. MUCH more. It just goes to show, once again, how much G-d values our usage of free-will, to the extent that He will let man use holy powers, for unholy purposes, for a time, that is.

However, only completely righteous people have permission to make use of the Divine Names, to unify them and to draw down the light of the Four-Letter Ineffable Name of G-d. Anyone else who tries to do so, say the Kabbalists, "cuts his plantings" -- that is, he brings about his own spiritual destruction at first, and then, very likely, his physical destruction. For, anyone who causes an emanation of the holy light from Above into the world below without the proper understanding and spiritual preparations has performed a great profanation, and will have to account for it.

In fact, there is a story in the Talmud of the great Rebi Chanina ben Teradyon, one of the Ten Martyrs we read about in the Musaf Service of Yom Kippur. For teaching Torah in public against Roman decree, he was burned alive together with the Sefer Torah from which he was caught teaching (Avodah Zarah 18a), and, his self-sacrifice for G-d until his terrible dying moment remains to be a tremendous sanctification of the Divine Name until this very day.

Nevertheless, the Talmud says, there was another reason behind the burning of this holy person, the death of his holy wife, and, the terrible mistreatment of his holy daughter: he used to use the 42-Letter Name of G-d to perform miracles as he pleased, according to Rashi, and, according to Tosfos,

he said the Four-Letter Name of G-d the way it is actually written, and not as it is to be pronounced until Moshiach comes and the world becomes a holier place. And, though it may be permissible to do so for the right reasons (educational purposes), says the Talmud, that is only in private, and not in public, as Rebi Chanina did.

And, if one were to do as Rebi Chanina, the RIGHT way, he would have to be sure that he is a holy enough vessel for the light of G-d that he is tapping into, and, that the world is ready for such a revelation. The Generation of the Dispersion were not and did not. And, as a result, they caused a separation of the light from the holy world above into the place of great spiritual impurity. They paid for their great sin, and, their descendants are STILL paying for it, and will until Moshiach comes -- which, judging by the direction and speed of history at this time, may not be too long from now.

MELAVE MALKAH:

A Song Ascents. When G-d will return the captivity of Zion, we will be like dreamers. (Tehillim 126:1)

On days during which Tachanun is not recited, either because it is Shabbos, a holiday or a simchah, this psalm is said in advance of Birchas HaMazon. Dovid HaMelech, according to tradition, wrote this one as the result of a prophecy of the future exile into Babylonia, and, is written as if the exiled nation was composing it themselves. But, since it speaks of redemption, it is appropriate for the festive atmosphere of Shabbos and Yom Tovim.

Why "like dreamers"? Because, one who dreams believes completely in the false reality of his dream until he awakens, for, that was his reality at the time playing in his mind. As he sleeps, he is unaware of the real reality that is all around him, but not within him.

However, after the dreamer awakens and passes over the threshold into the world of objective reality, it is only then that he realizes that all that he thought he had endured had been, comparatively speaking, imaginary. Disappointing if the dream had been better than life, but, exhilarating if life is better than the dream, and how much more so if the dream was a nightmare!

Jewish history is full of nightmares, and new ones are occurring as I write. They are real to us, VERY REAL to us -- the only reality we know at this time. But, Dovid HaMelech promised, and not just the Babylonian exiles either, but EVERY Jew in EVERY exile: the nightmare will end, eventually, and we will awaken to a beautiful reality that will make all the bad dreams of the past seem as if they never really occurred. It is called the "Final Redemption."

Then our mouth will be filled with laughter, and our tongue with glad song. (2)

And then, finally:

The nations will say among themselves, 'G-d has done greatly with these.' (2)

Which means, no more United Nations Security Council resolutions against Israel. For many of "them," they will awaken from a dream to a nightmare. Then again, the whole concept of "united nations" will take on different meaning under the leadership of the Moshiach.

G-d has done greatly with us, we will be happy! (3)

And, we'll finally be able to see history for what it was: a long path of stepping stones along the way to eternal bliss, and, we'll be able to understand and relate to the reasons why the nightmares were necessary, given our natures and decisions in life.

O G-d, return our captivity, like springs in the desert. Those who sow in tears, in glad song they shall reap. He who bears the worthy seed will walk on weeping. He will return in exultation, a bearer of his sheaves. (5-6)

What is the most feared thing in history? Pain, and for good reason: it hurts. And therefore, we fear anything and avoid anyone who can cause us pain. It has been the greatest marathon of all time, mankind's flight from pain. And, in spite of the fact that life seems to be "naturally" painful, and, that we know our best accomplishments come only with exertion, for, as the rabbis have said:

"According to the pain is the reward." (Pirkei Avos 5:22)

-- in This World and the Next -- we spend time, money, and energy avoiding pain.

It is THE reason, in spite of all the other many excuses and rationalizations, that so many Jews disregard Torah and mitzvos. But, Dovid HaMelech warns, the time will come to reap what has been sowed, and the crop will be eternal reward. Take responsibility for your Judaism now, commit yourself to Torah while it is still possible, and all hardships will pay future dividends beyond your wildest imagination. Whatever history will have denied you temporarily, G-d will repay you many times over, forever.

Just as the people of the Flood and the Generation of Dispersion.

Have a great Shabbos,
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