

JUDGING BY THE SITUATION

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

Judges and law enforcers you must establish in all your communities which G-d, your G-d gives to you throughout the tribes; they must judge the people fairly. (Devarim 16:18)

This verse, in a sense, is a disappointment. The Torah, supposedly, represents an ideal state of existence and level of life. The need for judges and law enforcers seems to speak to us on a lower, far less ideal level of living. If the Torah is eternal, should it not reflect that eternity by speaking in ultimate terms?

The difference is the difference between the first set of Tablets that Moshe Rabbeinu originally came down from Mt. Sinai with and subsequently broke, and, the second set of tablets that he later came down with eighty days later after achieving forgiveness for the golden calf. The first set of tablets were carved out by G-d and written on by G-d, but the second set were carved out by man (Moshe himself) and then written on by G-d.

This is also the reason why the Jewish people were only commanded to conquer seven nations of Canaan upon entering the land, as opposed to the original ten that G-d first spoke about; we didn't merit a complete acquisition of Eretz Yisroel, due to our sins in the desert. The ten nations, of course, correspond to the Ten Sefiros, and the seven nations we did have to fight against represent only the lower seven Sefiros, indicating our lack of spiritual ability to bring complete perfection to creation.

Even if all of this is true, and it is, how can the Torah, which is eternal and perfect, speak in terms of a "temporary" situation and "imperfection"?

The answer is because there is something called "Toras Atzilus" and "Toras Beriyah," something which can be explained through an analogy.

There is a mitzvah to honor the Shabbos and to enjoy oneself, for the sake of Shabbos. Does that mean that one can stir a pot of food on the "blech" (stove top covering as per Hilchos Shabbos) on Shabbos to make sure that it cooks evenly and not burn? No, and doing so is like cooking on Shabbos. If you want to stir it on Shabbos, it must already be completely cooked, and away from the source of heat.

What if someone did not know the law, and stirred the pot of food anyhow? Now what? Can the food be eaten on Shabbos, or do we say do without it and wait until Motzei Shabbos before enjoying what you were intending to enjoy on Shabbos itself?

It can often depend (and one should clarify with a competent rabbi if the situation occurs), if the food was completely cooked to begin with, it was stirred accidentally, and it is a main course for the Shabbos meal, then the food remains permissible because of the mitzvah to take pleasure on Shabbos for the sake of honoring it. It becomes the "l'chatchilah" (ideal) way in a "bidieved" (less-than-ideal) predicament.

In other words, ideals can change their appearance in different situations. In their ideal situation they are sublime and pristine. However, in their less-than-ideal situations, their applications can "disguise" their true natures. Toras Beriyah is just Toras Atzilus with layers of coverings called "applications for a less-than-perfect period of history."

However, traced back to their roots - Atzilus is a perfectly sublime level of reality from Beriyah emanates - even mitzvos such as the appointment of judges and law enforcers have a very sublime message to communicate about life in This World. And, they are messages that will still be relevant even after Moshiach comes, the yetzer hara is no more, and mankind ceases to sin.

Shabbos Day:

After you enter the land which G-d, your G-d gives to you, and possess it and live there and say, "I will make a king over me, just like all the surrounding na-tions" ... (Devarim 17:14)

Strange words for the Jewish nation: "Just like all the surrounding nations." In fact, they sort of seem to fly in the face of the concept of being a "light unto nations." This is not to say that there is not plenty of wisdom to learn from the non-Jewish nations; there is. However, important concepts like the appointment of kings should have an original source in the Torah.

It is like the whole episode with Yisro. When Yisro came to convert while the Jews were camped at Mt. Sinai, he was astonished to find people lined up all day to ask Moshe Rabbeinu legal questions. This prompted him to "suggest" that Moshe set up a hierarchy of legal deciders to ease the burden on Moshe himself and the people.

It seemed like a good idea at the time. However, in Parashas Devarim, Moshe Rabbeinu lets the Jewish people have it for that one. He reveals that he knew back then that the quarrelling Jewish people were only too happy to take Moshe out of the picture in everyday matters, which is why they were lined up day and night in the first place!

If the Torah had been effective and the Jewish people had been sincere, then when Yisro arrived at "Camp Sinai," he would have found Moshe and his colleagues sitting in the Bais Medrash discussing the intricacies of pre-Sinai law. This would have been because the rest of the nation would have been resolving all but the most serious cases on their own, and not trying to always win for the sake of winning.

However, it seems, though you can take the Jew out of Egypt, it is not so easy to take Egypt out of the Jew. And, that's what Yisro found when he came to meet Moshe and the Jewish people, though he did not quite understand the problem with it at the time, and he just went on suggesting like everything he said was new to the greatest leader of all time. "After all," Yisro might have asked, "what's wrong with being like all the surrounding nations?"

The answer is bobbing around today like a florescent sign on a dark night. This is, after all, the struggle at the heart of the Jewish nation today, especially in Eretz Yisroel. On one side of the struggle you have the main stream of Torah Judaism that has existed for over 3,000 years now, and on the other side of the spectrum you have the secular population which is fighting tooth-and-nail to be "just like all the surrounding nations" (at least to the West of the country).

It is amazing. The religious see following after the ways of the non-Jewish nations as a regression, no matter how advanced they become technologically. Western society has not perfected morality, indeed, they are quite distant from it, having become so liberal in their views that it is starting to backfire on them, whether they are willing to admit it or not.

On the other hand, the "other side," the so-called "Left" of the nation sees religion as being regressive, oppressive, and obsessive. By deciding to be "separate" from the rest of the nations, Judaism, the Left feels, holds them back from being able to "fit in" with the rest of the nations of the world (read: have fun like the rest of 'em).

And they are right, for that is the way it is supposed to be. For "fun" is what the Western world falls into when we stop teaching the world about pleasure, when we stop being a light unto nations. And, if that is what happens when we stop teaching the world about pleasure, then certainly following after THEIR definitions and THEIR values doesn't help the matter at all!

Furthermore, and worse of all, not only does it NOT help the situation any, but, eventually the situation turns on us, as it is now. And it will take some time because we're not so willing to take the bull by the horns, but Heaven is trying to re-ignite our light once again. It is hard to see now, but a process has begun to separate us once again from the nations around the world, with the objective of restoring Jewish pride in being a light unto the nations once again.

SEUDAH SHLISHIS:

If in the land which G-d, your G-d gives you to possess, you find a dead body fallen in the field, but do not know who killed him . . . (Devarim 21:1)<

This is another example of the Torah addressing a less-than-ideal world. That murder can exist at all is troubling enough; that the murderer can get away with it brings into the question the whole idea of Divine Providence and how involved G-d actually is in the affairs of man on a daily basis.

There is a midrash that says that Moshe Rabbeinu once asked G-d to show him how He runs the world, so that he could better understand the events of daily life that do not make sense. So G-d showed him a scene in which some poor children stole a money pouch from off the horse of a wealthy man, and then fled with it to the local lake while the rich man enjoyed himself inside the inn.

By the time the man came out and realized what he had lost, the poor children were long gone and swimming in the lake, thinking there was no way for the man to find them. In the meantime, a beggar, walking along the beach, found the money pouch hidden behind a rock, and thinking that Heaven was showing him mercy, he made off with the money unbeknownst to the swimming children.

In the meantime, the wealthy man had gathered some others to accompany him in search of the money, and it wasn't long until they came across the children without the money, and the beggar with the money. Judgment was swift: the wealthy person did not accept the beggar's plea of innocence, and beat him to the point of death, and then rode off.

Moshe was horrified. Knowing that G-d is forever just didn't help him to understand the justice of the "tragedy" that had just unfolded before his very eyes. Until, that is, the Master of the Universe Himself provided the explanation.

"The wealthy man once extorted money from a widow, and needed to suffer somewhat for his sin. The children were simply poor and innocent. They should not have stolen the money, but in their situation of poverty, it is understandable that they did. The beggar who found the money had murdered another beggar down the beach just yesterday for a piece of bread. However, there were no witnesses to testify against him in a court of law. Thus, justice was exercised from all sides."

Moshe understood from this small example of Divine Providence just how G-d orchestrates each and every event with fairness, though such fairness is not readily apparent to man who is not omniscient. Hence, when it comes to life's events, we are like people who walk in at the middle of the film, unable to properly figure out the direction of the plot until the end.

Sometimes, the reason for good or bad events is recent, though we may have forgotten them or fail to make the connection. Sometimes, the reason for an inexplicable episode may go beyond one's present lifetime, into previous gilgulim (reincarnations).

In fact, in Shaar HaGilgulim, Rav Chaim Vital discusses his own past history of gilgulim. There he explains that, in his first gilgul, he did an accidental sin that caused his second gilgul to do a sin that

was more intentional. Sent back into a third gilgul to make amends, he instead committed a fully intentional sin that required the punishment of dying early (kores). He died in that life as a young 14-year old boy. But, when they buried the young 14-year old Avraham, did anyone know why he had died so early, especially since he was probably a normal child? How could anyone have known, unless they were prophets?

Nevertheless, even though to our eyes justice would have seemed quite distant and question marks would appear all over the place, in the context of the bigger historical picture, all the pieces fit together. In the meantime, the hand of G-d remains hidden, that is, why events happen as they do remains obscure, leaving room for believing and trusting people to have faith in G-d and His justice.

The Eglah Arufah - the mitzvah to which the posuk refers to above, is just another reminder of this central and fundamental point of Divine Providence.

MELAVE MALKAH:

History & Beyond: The Soul World & Beyond

"... It is for this reason that G-d prepared a Soul World. When a soul leaves its body, it enters this Soul World and remains there in a state of rest while the body undergoes what it must. During this period, the soul experiences sublime delight, very much like that which will be bestowed on the individual later in the period of genuine reward. Its level in the Soul World is also determined by its accomplishments, just as the ultimate reward . . . Besides being a place for the soul to await resurrection, the Soul World also provides another benefit for the soul, and ultimately for the resurrected body as well . . . When the soul leaves the body and enters the Soul World, however, it can then radiate freely with a brightness that befits it as a result of its good deeds [while associated with the body]. Through both this and what it can attain in the Soul World, the soul is able to regain the power that it lost while associated with body. This in turn makes it more qualified for the its ultimate function after the resurrection, namely, the purification of the body . . ." (Derech Hashem 1:3:11-12)

The first time I learned this section from Derech Hashem, it was prior to my having any knowledge of the Zohar's version of Techiyas HaMeisim, and the Leshem's commentary on it. I just assumed, like many, that the Ramchal was referring to the period of time after the year 6000, since, I assumed, the resurrection would only occur after then.

However, within the context of the Zohar's time table for Techiyas HaMeisim, the Soul World will be a reality only UNTIL the year 6000, by which time Resurrection of the Dead must be over. If so, then, what happens to history and mankind from the year 6000 and onward?

As we have said before, the Ten Sefiros that act as spiritual filters for G-d's light to make reality and ultimately, our lives possible, also contain the "data" for distinct periods of time in history. Thus, the

sefirah of Chesed governed the first one thousand years of history, Gevurah the second, and so forth until the sixth millennium, which is rooted in the sefirah of Yesod.

Now, the first thing to know is that time is relative, as physicists themselves teach. If this is so during the six thousand years, how much more so is this the case after the year 6000. So, even though we may talk in terms of 1,000 year periods of time, it is only a borrowed term.

In other words, the period between Year 6000 and Year 7000 - 1,000 years - is not made up of seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years. There is a passage of time because there is development, there is spiritual movement upwards towards the Source of all existence.

To appreciate this, as I have mentioned earlier, some fundamentals of Kabbalah must be discussed.

In the beginning (and I don't mean the one referred to in the first verse of the creation story but far earlier than this), there was the light of Ain Sof (literally, "Without End"), the name used to describe the light of G-d, which is infinite. It was everywhere, perfect and sublime.

When the will of G-d determined to create a world that could support mankind, the concept of free-will and eternal reward, Kabbalah teaches that He pulled back His light from within the "center" of Ain Sof, and, as a result, left a "hollow" in the shape of a large sphere that was devoid of the same level of light. The future universe with which we are familiar, wouldn't even be a pin's head in size compared to the hollow within which it would later exist.

The result was a spiritual void that was surrounded by the light of Ain Sof in such a way that it could not collapse the vacuum within. However, that was only stage one, for just as man could not exist within the non-filtered light of Ain Sof, so he could not exist within an absence of light of Ain Sof either.

Therefore, G-d allowed the light of Ain Sof to pour back into the void from which it was constricted, but in a controlled and regulated way. This would allow for the creation of different levels of reality without destroying them in the process, eventually making possible a physical creation that could support human life.

The process of the light coming down was one of reducing its spiritual intensity through an extremely intricate and sophisticated system of spiritual "transformers." Each one was designed to hold back a Divinely-ordained level of light, which resulted in a "weaker" light for the lower levels that followed. Eventually, this would result in a light so weak that it could allow for evil, sin, and free-will.

Hence, the process of creation is really one of light moving through time, G-d's time, and history is just the record of what that light has, is, and will do along its path from its Source - Ain Sof - towards the center of the "hollow." It will continue along its path until it reaches a point at which time the light is to begin changing its direction, a point that only G-d knows and pre-determined when He first thought to make creation.

In other words, at a point in time, the light will begin to back-track, and rather than move away from Ain Sof, it will begin to return back in the direction of Ain Sof, and with it will go the levels of reality that it created on the "way down." The final destination of the light: the Malchus of Ain Sof.

What does this mean? That is a question that can only be answered once we get there, G-d willing, because there is nothing in human experience and consciousness to compare it to. However, it does mean that "creation" will never completely reverse itself, because then nothing would have ever really been accomplished in the big scheme of things, and according to tradition, G-d did all of THIS so that we should enjoy the World-to-Come-FOREVER.

This idea does create some philosophical dilemmas that result from our inability to relate to such high levels of spiritual consciousness and sublime Divine light. But, suffice it to say that such dilemmas exist only to us, and not to G-d, and even we'll resolve them at the proper time. However, in the meantime, I have introduced this concept of the "returning light" in order to speak about the concept of the World-to-Come, the final destination of this light.

Have a great Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston
