

V'CHEIN L'YEMOS HAMOSHIACH

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d spoke to Moshe and said to him, "I appeared to Avraham to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov as E'l Shadd"ai, and, My Name Y-H-V-H I did not make known to them" (Shemos 6:2)

This, of course, is G-d's response to Moshe Rabbeinu's complaint about the increased slavery of the Jewish people in last week's parshah. Moshe thought he had made the situation worse by requesting the release of his people -- which he did -- and lost faith in the forthcoming redemption. G-d told him that his Forefathers, who never had a chance to witness what he was witnessing -- the redeeming, promise-fulfilling power of Y-H-V-H -- never doubted the future redemption for a moment.

"Furthermore, I established My covenant with THEM, to give THEM the land of Canaan, the land of THEIR sojournings, where THEY lived. Furthermore again, I have heard the crying out of the Children of Israel, as a result of Egyptian oppression, and, I have remembered My covenant. THEREFORE, tell the Children of Israel, I am Y-H-V-H who will take them out from under the Egyptian burden(4-6)

What was G-d's point to Moshe? It was a simple point. It was a VERY simple point. But, it is THE point for ALL of Jewish history, one that seems to be lost on a large part of our generation today, and, it goes something like this:

"I see," says G-d. "You wonder about My method of redemption, do you Moshe? You wonder because you see a broken people working continuously under the rulership of an evil king who does not fear G-d, and, you see G-d doing little to stop him. In other words, Moshe, you have questions. But do you know Moshe, that all of your questions are the result of a limited perspective because you have failed to see the larger picture one that reaches all the way back in time to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov? Moshe, understand that this redemption from Egyptian slavery, foretold to Avraham 429 years ago, is not about redeeming a broken Jewish people. No, it is about redeeming the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov! It is about the fulfillment of promises made long ago by Me to great men who walked with me, in spite of all their hardships, in spite of all the mysteries of the way I dealt with them. And, furthermore, Moshe, Geulas-Mitzrayim is not just about the fulfillment of promises made to a single people, but rather, it is about the fulfillment of ALL OF HISTORY, from its beginning until its end, for, I have made the continuation of creation contingent

upon Jewish acceptance of Torah at Mt. Sinai, in the upcoming year, 2448 from creation (Shabbos 88a)! A lesson Moshe, for you and for ALL generations to come: think in terms of the past and the future, and, you will better be able to understand and bear the present."

Amar Rava: V'chein L'Yemos HaMoshiach -- Rava said: It will be the same for the Days of Moshiach. (Sanhedrin 111a)

Rava is actually talking about how many people will survive the Final Redemption, using the redemption from Egypt as his example. However, in doing so, he has set up a parallel between that redemption, and, the one coming up, b"H, hopefully in the not-too-distant future.

For example, not too long ago, journalist Jonathan Rosenblum wrote the following:

A nation that has no past has no future.

The Arabs have no trouble comprehending the relationship between the Jews' declining connections to their roots and the flowering of their own national aspirations. Palestinian national fervor has been fueled by the loss of our own national identity.

Sallah Tamari, a Palestinian parliamentarian, related to Israeli journalist Aharon Barnea, a dramatic transformation in his thinking that took place when he was an Israeli security prisoner.

While in jail, he noticed his Jewish warder eating pita during Pesach. When he asked him how he could do such a thing, the Jewish guard replied, "I feel no obligation to events that took place over 3,000 years ago."

Until then, Tamari had concluded that Israel was too powerful and that the Palestinians would never realize any of their territorial dreams. But that night he could not sleep. All night he thought to himself, "A nation whose members have no connection to their past, and are capable of so openly transgressing their most important laws -- that nation has cut off all its roots to the Land."

From then on, he determined "to fight for everything -- not a percentage, not such crumbs as the Israelis might throw us -- but for everything. Because opposing us is a nation that has no connection to its roots."

End of article, but, not the end of the story. This is not about making "compromises for peace," as we are being told by people who live only in and for the present. This is about making compromises for history, for the master plan of creation, for the sake of the fulfillment of ancient and eternal promises. And, if any compromises need to be made by the Jewish people, it is with respect to our we-know-better-than-G-d attitude, and our fear of human forces that really don't matter that much, in the end.

We need to stop sacrificing the past and future of the Jewish people on the altar of the present, and know and believe that what we are undergoing is much bigger than we make it out to be, and work with G-d, and not against Him.

Shabbos Day:

G-d hardened the heart of Paroah and he did not listen to him, just as G-d had told Moshe. (Shemos 9:12)

What does it mean to have a "hard heart"? Usually, it means to be a cold person, someone who is unable to feel for other people in situations of need. A person with a hard heart is someone who is unable to show mercy at a time when most people would. If so, does this mean that, had G-d not hardened the heart of Paroah, he would have shown mercy to the Jewish people?

Unlikely. Enemies usually relish the downfall of the other side, and feel that whatever happened to their foe was justified. G-d didn't have to harden Paroah's heart to make sure he would not feel mercy for the Jewish people who were still enslaved. Rather, G-d hardened Paroah's heart to make sure that he wouldn't have mercy on HIMSELF and his OWN people.

And, how did He do it? Physically, Paroah's heart stayed the same, as did the blood pumping through it. He did it by getting Paroah's goat, hitting him where he lived, by agitating his pride and making sure that Paroah perceived a challenge, so that he would sacrifice all to win, and, in the end lose, and quite badly at that.

This is one of the reasons why Paroah's name is "Paroah," spelled: peh-raish-ayin-heh. These letters, when re-arranged, spell the word "arufah" (ayin-raish-peh-heh), which refers to the back of the neck -- the symbol of stubbornness. Hence, one who is stubborn is called, "kasheh oref" -- stiff-necked, metaphorically-speaking.

The Jew who stubbornly refuses to redeem his firstborn donkey and give a sheep to the kohen in its place, as the Torah prescribes, must break the back of the neck of that donkey. And, the calf that is killed when a murdered person is found, but whose murderer brazenly ran from the scene, has its neck broken from the back.

Stubbornness implies a person's unwillingness to abandon his opinion in spite of the fact that reality demands it. A stubborn person insists that he is right, in spite of the fact that he is clearly wrong, and, more than likely, knows it too on some level. And, stubborn people become dangerous when enough of them get together and impose their incorrect perspective on those around them, or, even one obtains high position of power.

But, the worst part of it is, that, stubborn people have no free-will, at least with respect to the decision about which they are stubborn. For, free-will requires a clear perspective of what is morally correct, and, what is morally incorrect, and, enough objectivity to realize there is a choice between the two, and, the potential to choose either. Stubborn people, for whatever reason, can only "feel"

the importance of their own opinion, are blind to the validity of the counter-opinion, and, therefore, lack free-will.

What we learn from Paroah is the way G-d deals with stubborn people, which, is the same way He deals with ALL sinners: measure-for-measure. In other words, He lets the person's own stubbornness be the source of his own downfall. He does this by creating scenarios for the person that instigate his stubbornness, and then He steps back while the person's own pride walks them further down their path of falsehood, smack into the wall of reality, eventually.

It is called a "wall of reality," because, that is precisely what it is. It is the ideological and moral line in the sand, drawn by a Divinely-designed and immutable purpose of creation. Evil can prosper (also for the sake of free-will), but it can never win, not in the long run. Just like most stubborn people, if they don't jump their ship of stubbornness early enough, meet with a tragic end, as a result of their own pride and unwillingness to bend for truth.

Defined in these terms, can we afford to take our attitudes toward Torah and mitzvos lightly, if we don't hold them in high esteem?

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

G-d did what Moshe had said, and He removed the wild animals from Paroah, his servants, and his people -- not one remained. (Shemos 8:27)

Rashi, sensing something extra in this verse, explains the emphasis on the removal of all the wild animals:

REMOVED THE WILD ANIMALS: Because, if they had merely died, they would have benefited from their skins. (Rashi)

Interesting people, these Egyptians. They certainly know how to make the best out of a no-win situation, kind of like the French nobility during the revolution, who, sensing the end of their lives, decided to "eat, drink, and be merry."

Though frogs can be cute playthings sometimes (if you like that kind of thing), they must be downright unbearable in the billions and into everything you own (and eat). Yet, what did the Egyptians do once Moshe ordered the end of the plague. Says the Midrash: they made a massive barbecue! Here G-d was destroying the land and taking the Egyptians to task for oppressing the Jewish people, and the Egyptians went ahead and made a holiday out of it!

That was the second plague. Now, a few months and plagues later, Egypt has taken quite a beating. The Plague of Wild Animals must have horrified the people and left them trembling. The average person, upon realizing the plague was over, probably would want to destroy every last reminder of

the plague that was, no?

Not the Egyptians. Upon completion of the plague, they would have been out in the streets looking to make a killing off all those animals skins, once again looking to find reward in G-d's punishment. This time G-d would have none of it, and, all that remained from the animals was the horrifying memory and the warning of what was to happen to Egypt in the end.

So, we read this and say, "Hah! Silly people! They go ahead and make a barbecue out of all those disgusting frogs. And, then they think only about the potential financial gains from the wild animals that ravaged their cities. How mercenary can you get?"

Well, we might be able to answer that question ourselves. G-d's warnings come in many forms, but, come they do. And, in spite of the fact that messages about doing teshuvah are being hurled at us left, right, and center, still, we're out there making "barbecues," eating, drinking, and making merry when we ought to be serious about our lives and the future of the Jewish people.

When G-d turns up the heat on Jewish history, you don't make holidays out of it. You don't look impending danger in the face and say, "Well, today things seem quite peaceful, so why worry?"

Just think about how much Tehillim was said during the Persian Gulf War, and how many miracles occurred, probably as a result. And, as if true to the Divine script, the events coincided with parshios from the Torah, and, Saddam Hussein was nice enough to end the war on Purim! So, what did we do? We ate and drank and made a celebration, and let life go back to where it was before this intrusion began until, that is, the next one took its place.

What would have happened if, instead of closing our sifrei Tehillim, we kept them open and kept up the Tehillim? What would have happened if, instead of being cold to one another once again, we kept up the unity that the war brought out in all of us? Why did we assume the work was over, when, clearly, it had only just begun!

The start of the war was to end old ways, and, the end of the war was to begin new ways. Instead, we celebrated the chance to return back to the quiet of before, which had never been G-d's intention. It is the "loud" moments that get our attention. It is the "quiet" ones that allow us to make the changes we must make, to bring the Torah's plan for creation to fulfillment.

MELAVE MALKAH:

A psalm of Dovid. G-d, hear my prayer, listen to my supplications, answer me in Your faithfulness, in Your righteousness. Do not enter into strict judgment with Your servant, for no living creature would be innocent before You. (Tehillim 143:1-2)

The Midrash teaches that G-d wanted, originally, to make the world function according to strict

justice. None of this, "three-strikes-and-you're-out" business; ONE STRIKE and you're out! However, continues the Midrash, He saw, in His infinite wisdom, that no man could ever survive in such a situation, so He instead made the world run according to mercy, as our very existence, 5761 years later after the first sin proves.

However, we have also seen over the last 5,761 years, that mercy is not always the prevailing force, and the Midrash confirms this, saying that justice was not outdone. Rather, a partnership was formed, call it, "Justice & Mercy Inc.," if you'd like.

Dovid HaMelech is acknowledging this partnership, and is pleading that mercy have a strong say in determining the events of his life.

For, the enemy pursued my soul, he ground my life into the dirt, he sat me in utter darkness, like those who are long dead. When my spirit grew faint within me, my heart within me was shocked (3-4)

In other words, though it is my enemies who pursue me and embitter my life, the Talmud teaches that all must first be decreed in Heaven (Chullin 7b). If so, then what I am undergoing is my own fault -- payment for sins I have committed. Nevertheless, I plead to the side of mercy, to soften my judgment, and to spare me the full impact of my wrongdoings -- all of which I regret, of course.

I recalled days of old, I thought about all Your deeds, I spoke about Your handiwork. I spread out my hands to You, my soul longs for You like the thirsty land. Selah. (5-6)

After all, that is what it is all about, is it not? What parent punishes a child just for the sake of punishment? True, as the Talmud teaches, suffering atones, if we're lucky, after we have done teshuvah. However, there is an aspect of punishment that comes just to wake the perpetrator up to the seriousness of their crime. Surely that part become unnecessary if the sinner has clearly indicated a sincere and complete understanding of why he must never (willingly) commit the same transgression.

Answer me soon, O G-d, my spirit is spent; do not hide Your face from me, making me like those who descend into the pit. Let me hear Your kindness at dawn, for, in You have I placed my trust; let me know the way I should walk, for to You have I lifted my soul. (7-8)

"Many are the thoughts of a man's heart, but, the plan of G-d is what endures" (Mishlei 19:21), or, the Yiddish version (translated): Man plans and G-d laughs. In simple philosophical terms, it is a question of working WITH G-d, or AGAINST Him, for what matters is not personal success, but the success of creation, and, ignoring this reality causes us to "spin our wheels" until all that is left is despair and resignation, for abandonment of G-d means abandonment by G-d -- hester panim -- and vulnerability to the agents of evil. Only trust in G-d can pull us out of the mire.

Rescue me from my enemies, G-d, I have hidden my plight from all but You. Teach me to do Your will, for You are my G-d. May Your good spirit guide me over level ground. For Your Name's sake, G-

d, revive me, with Your righteousness remove my soul from distress. And, with Your kindness cut off my enemies and destroy all who oppress my soul, for I am Your servant. (9-12)

In Chassidus, it is called "hisbatlus," which, in English translates loosely as "cancellation," or, "abandonment." It is the state of mental reality where a person becomes so clear about G-d's greatness and love for him that he ceases to resist complete spiritual capitulation to truth, the Truth. It is this that causes the images of evil to disappear into thin air, and removes all fear of perceived enemies. For, they exist anyhow just to turn us back to Hashem Yisborach, and the realization that this are "none other than Him."

Have a great Shabbos,
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