

THE HONEYMOON BEGINS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d spoke to Moshe and Aharon in the Land of Egypt saying, "This month will be the first of the months for you . . ." (Shemos 12:1-2)

Here comes Parashas Bo! Here come the mitzvos!

As Rashi points out all the way back at the beginning of the Torah, the first mitzvah the Jewish people receive as a nation is the positive mitzvah to sanctify the new moon. It is a mitzvah that has the Jewish people establishing the new month based upon the actual sighting of the new moon, when the nation lives in Eretz Yisroel and the Sanhedrin still functions.

The moon is one of those things in life that if you don't know better, you will think that it isn't all that significant. However, just the fact that the Jewish people are compared to the moon (Succah 29a), is reason enough to wonder if it is special, or at least represents something special.

The moon first made it onto the international scene on Day Four of creation when G-d went about making the "Great Luminaries" to light up the day and the evening sky. According to the Midrash, originally the moon was equal in brilliance to the sun, but after questioning the value in having "two kings who wear the same crown," G-d solved that problem by reducing the light of the moon to what it is today (Chullin 60b). The moral of the story: Be happy with your portion and don't be jealous of others.

How true. It is an eternal lesson for sure. However, it is not really what is going on over here, and certainly such a moral does not justify G-d giving the Jewish people a mitzvah to sanctify the new moon right off the bat, even before we arrived at the place necessary to execute the mitzvah itself. If we let Kabbalah have its says, then we can end up with a new appreciation of the new month, which is about to be upon us, G-d willing, may it come only for good.

Imagine a classroom made up of two levels of students, one group being made up of "A-students" and one group made up of "C-students." The natural tendency of the A-students will be to associate with one another only, and form their own exclusive group. This, of course, will be to the detriment of the lower-grade group which, lacking an example of excellence will most likely under-achieve in school.

The teacher, however, finds the situation unacceptable knowing that the C-students are capable of achieving much more if motivated by a good example. Therefore, in order to rectify the situation he decides to approach an A-student and request that he associate with the C-students in order to motivate and inspire them.

There will be resistance for sure on the part of the A-student, who can only see it as everything but beneficial for himself. However, being the loyal student that he is, he accepts his teacher's recommendation and moves his desk and life to the side of the C-students'. He knows that he can never really feel that comfortable with the shift, and that at times he might even feel "violated" to some degree.

Nevertheless, it is a sacrifice imposed upon him for the betterment of the society for which the world was ultimately created, though he yearns for the day that he can be amongst his own - that all of the students can be amongst his own. In the meantime, it is his job to make it work, and that is what he intends to do while in the situation he has found himself.

What does this have to do with the moon and the Jewish people you are asking? Everything! All we have to do is put all the proper characters into their corresponding roles in the analogy, and we will begin to understand two of the deepest and most profound concepts in the Zohar HaKodesh: Mi-ute HaLavanah and Shechinah b'Golus - the reduction of the moon's light and the exile of the Divine Presence - in the next d'var Torah.

Shabbos Day:

"... It will be the first month of the year for you." (Shemos 12:2)

There is a concept in Torah called, "yeridah tzorech aliyah" - a going down that is for the sake of going up. It is one of those phenomenon in life that is so universal that all societies seem to have taken note of it and have described it in their own terms.

It is not that a person should intentionally allow himself to spiritually fall with the intention of getting up again and growing higher. It often doesn't work when we plan it that way; too many people in such a predicament end up staying down.

However, when the yeridah is unintentional, thrust upon us by one circumstance or another, then it can end up having a positive outcome. It can be like two friends or even spouses who have a rift, but who become even closer after resolving it.

Nowhere is this concept more true than by the Malchus of Atzilus.

The Malchus of what?

The Malchus of ATZILUS.

What's an Atzilus? What's a Malchus?

The Malchus of Atzilus is just one of the many spiritual levels - the tenth one in the spiritual realm called "Atzilus" - that separates man from G-d for our own good. This is because the light of "Ain Sof" (Without End), the name we give the light of G-d, is so spiritually overwhelming that physical man could never withstand exposure to it in its pure or even close-to-pure form.

Therefore, G-d put into place different levels of spiritual "filters" to reduce the light as it emanates from Ain Sof to man, without which life could not go on - not even for a nanosecond. The Malchus of Atzilus is one such level within a very elaborate system of spiritual filters designed to allow the light of G-d to come down according to the needs of creation, man, and history.

However, as one would suspect, the higher up one spiritually climbs, the holier the levels become. In fact, at some point, the levels of light must become so holy that evil can no longer exist and everything must be, by definition, G-dly. Indeed, there must even be a point in the spiritual realm at which the INTRINSIC G-dliness ceases to manifest itself for all intents-and-purposes. That point is called the Malchus of Atzilus.

Seeing that the Malchus of Atzilus is the hand-off point for the light of G-d to the lower, lesser G-dly worlds within which we live at this stage of history - light without which we would cease to exist - it is "Her" light that is said to have left its Heavenly Abode and descended completely for the benefit of the lower worlds. She went down so that we can go up.

However, we can't go up unless it is with her light, and one of the main points of all that we do in life is to cause her light to return to its rightful place in the sublime and G-dly spiritual world of Atzilus. When we learn Torah, do mitzvos and perform good deeds, we spiritually buoy the light of the Malchus of Atzilus upwards towards its ultimate place Above.

We'll know when we've done this because the world will simply become a better and more spiritual place; evil will go up like smoke.

What about the moon in all of this? The light of the Malchus of Atzilus is considered Kabbalistically, to be the spiritual source of the light of the moon. The fact that it had to emanate down into the lower worlds all the way from the beginning of creation is called "Mi-ute Halavanah" - the reduction of the moon's light, the real story behind that Midrash.

Thus, there really was no better time to deliver the mitzvah of Kiddush HaChodesh - the Sanctification of the New Moon - to the Jewish nation, a nation that is compared to the moon, which is compared to the light of the Malchus of Atzilus. Rectify one of them, and you rectify them all, and bring ALL of creation to fulfillment.

SEUDAH SHLISHIS:

G-d said to Moses, "Come to Pharaoh . . ." (Shemos 10:1)

There are a lot of bizarre things that happen throughout the redemption story. However, that doesn't bother us because they only emphasize the Divine Providence in all that occurred, as Dovid HaMelech taught, "This is from G-d, that which is wondrous in our eyes." (Tehillim 118:23)

One of the things that stands out is the honor that Moshe and Aharon continued to show Paroah from the beginning until the very end:

Command the Children of Israel and Paroah, King of Egypt . . . (Shemos 6:13)

PAROAH KING OF EGYPT: He commanded them to speak to him with honor. (Rashi)

The question is why? It certainly wasn't because Moshe and Aharon were afraid to anger Paroah, since they were acting as the vehicles to systematically destroy Egypt. Do you also have to worry about being polite in front of evil people in order to sanctify the Name of G-d?

The following provides an insight into what was really going on:

The Torah commands us to show honor and to flatter the Sitra Achara (literally, "Other Side"), for the sake of the holiness that was hidden within it from before G-d made creation, as The Holy One, Blessed is He, commanded Moshe and Aharon to speak to Paroah with honor (Rashi, Shemos 6:13). The Sitra Achara, knowing that the honor it receives is because of the holiness from its side, pursues after the Sitra d'Taharah (Pure Side) like a monkey after a man. (Sefer Galia Raza)

This is a phenomenal concept that is VERY difficult to appreciate, but from which comes a VERY important lesson. Look at the sensitivity! How easy it is to forget that even an evil person could not live if it wasn't for the Holy Spark within him, especially when he abuses it by using it to fulfill his evil goals. Even Moshe and Aharon had to be reminded to show Paroah respect, not because of Paroah himself, but because of the Holy Spark to which he played host.

If this is true of evil people, how much more so must it be true for people who try to be good, and even more so for people who are good. For, when it comes to human beings, what you see is not what you get, since all we can see is the body, and not the many Holy Sparks clothed within.

This helps to explain why G-d stopped the angels from singing praise upon the drowning of the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Megillah 10b). They thought that the elimination of evil people from the world was a completely good thing and cause for Heavenly celebration.

However, G-d informed them otherwise, and told them to cease singing immediately. Those weren't just Egyptians being tossed around in the sea below, they were bodies that contained Holy Sparks,

though far fewer than holy people might contain. This is why G-d would rather see the evil person repent than to destroy him, for the sake of the Holy Sparks within him.

We may have difficulty honoring some people in this world, but we have to remember that whatever it is we see on the outside, there are Holy, Heavenly sparks on the inside worthy of our respect.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Chanukah & The Wonderful World of Thirty-Six

Installment #7, Chapter Six, Part Two: The Tribes of Israel

Yehudah had married a wife who bore him three children, Er, Onan, and Shelah. The oldest son, Er, married Tamar, a righteous woman (she had been the daughter of Noach's son, Shem; Bereishis Rabbah 85:11). However, Er was not so righteous and deserved death from Heaven. After he died and left his wife childless, Yehudah told Onan to marry his brother's wife in order to prevent the end of his dead son's name, the mitzvah of Yibum.

However, Onan was more like his brother than his sister-in-law, and he too angered G-d and deserved death. After Onan died, Yehudah was worried that Shelah too might suffer the same fate if he married Tamar. He instead instructed her to return to her father's house for a while until Shelah was older.

Time passed and even though Shelah was now of an age to marry Tamar, Yehudah did not arrange it. Knowing that her fate lay with Yehudah's family, Tamar took the initiative to complete the process that Yehudah had started many years before.

Dressed as a harlot to attract Yehudah, Tamar positioned herself at the crossroads near the place Avraham used to live, a place she knew every passerby stopped to visit. Yehudah noticed her, but recognized her only as a harlot and passed her by. But Heaven knew who she really was and asked, "From which union will kings arise if not from this one?" (Bereishis Rabbah 85:8).

Thus, even against his will, Yehudah was drawn towards the veiled Tamar. In a sense, it was another act of "measure-for-measure," for one who does not recognize the hand of G-d becomes a pawn in His master plan. Had Yehudah been more keenly aware of Divine Providence, he might have noticed that something unique was happening.

A deal was struck between Yehudah and Tamar for her hire: One kid goat from the flock. In the meantime, Yehudah was to leave his signet ring, his cloak and his staff as a pledge until he could make good on his word. Yehudah later went on his way, unaware that, min hashamayim Tamar had conceived a child who would be the ancestor of Dovid HaMelech, and eventually Melech Moshiach.

After Yehudah returned home, he sent the kid goat he had promised in exchange for the pledge he

had left behind. The "harlot," however, was nowhere to be found. Afraid that further pursuit of her would lead to humiliation, Yehudah left well enough alone and went on with his life.

Three months later Yehudah was informed that Tamar was pregnant. Being the daughter of a priest (Shem), she was punishable by death, and the necessary arrangements were made to carry out her execution by burning. In the meantime, Tamar said nothing to reveal the father of her children (she was pregnant with twins).

At the last moment, Tamar sent the signet ring, cloak and staff to Yehudah saying, "The man to whom these things belong, he is the one who made me pregnant." Tamar reasoned that if Yehudah admitted that they belonged to him, then she would be saved. However, if he chose to remain silent, then she was prepared to die with her secret.

But Yehudah did not remain silent:

Yehudah recognized the ring, cloak, and staff, and said, "She is more righteous than I am. She did this, because I did not give her to Shelah my son." (Bereishis 38:26)

Thus, Tamar was saved from a fiery death, and Yehudah was forced to admit his error. But more importantly, the Master of the Universe brought creation one step closer to the light of Melech Moshiach with the birth of Peretz.

In the meantime, back in Egypt, the "bear" hunted Yosef. Time after time, the wife of Potiphar sought Yosef, but to no avail. On one occasion, after Yosef refused his master's wife, she accused him of attacking her. To save face, Potiphar had no choice but to heed his wife and put Yosef in jail. This seemed a downturn in events as prison was a far cry from the lifestyle Yosef had enjoyed in the house of Potiphar. However, this too had been for the good - an important stepping-stone along the path to the heights of power in Egypt.

In prison, Yosef also earned the respect of his new master, the prison warden. In the meantime, Divine Providence had Paroah's chief butler and wine steward thrown into the same cell as Yosef, and both servants dreamed. The next morning they sought out a dream interpreter and Yosef availed himself to explain the meaning of their dreams. For the wine steward, he interpreted favorably, predicting a return to his former glory. For the baker, however, he predicted capital punishment.

The seeds planted to free him from prison had begun to sprout.

Up until that point, Yosef had performed well ascribing his ability to interpret dreams to G-d Himself. But now Yosef added words that cost him two extra years in prison. He told the wine steward:

When things go well for you, please do a kindness for me and mention me to Paroah, and have me released from this prison. I was kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews. Here also I did nothing, and yet they placed me in this pit. (Bereishis 40:14)

But later the verse says,

And the chief wine steward did not remember Yosef and forgot him. (Bereishis 40:23)

FORGOT HIM: Because Yosef depended upon him to remember him, he had to spend two extra years [in prison]. (Rashi)

One might ask: Did not Yosef make a simple effort to free himself from prison? Was his effort so unreasonable as to constitute a violation of trust in G-d? Some answer this question by stating that as Yosef haTzadik, he should not have even made such a simple request; on his level of spiritual greatness, it was enough to trust G-d entirely.

However, perhaps Yosef's error was something different. After all, why did Yosef feel compelled to explain how he arrived in prison, revealing that he was kidnapped and falsely accused? Was not all of that min hashamayim and therefore for the good?

Perhaps, as much as Yosef knew and understood that, it had not been as real to him as it ought to have been. Now, the two extra years in prison made the hand of G-d in his life even more apparent than before, and they prepared him to be the vehicle to teach this central theme of, "everything originates from Heaven," to his brothers who still grappled with the issue.

After the two years had finally passed, Paroah also dreamed his famous dream. He dreamed of seven thin cows that consumed seven healthy cows, and of seven poor stalks that consumed seven healthy stalks. Conveniently, no one in the entire kingdom was able to interpret the dream to Paroah's satisfaction, which reminded the wine steward of a young Jew in prison who had a knack for interpreting dreams accurately.

Apparently, after thirteen years of being on the way down, the time had finally come to fulfill Yosef's boyhood dream of becoming a ruler.

As the Torah relates, Yosef so satisfactorily interpreted Paroah's dreams, that Paroah saw in him wisdom beyond his years and the help of Heaven. For this reason, he elevated Yosef from prisoner to Second-in-Command, which is exactly where he had to be to drive the message of Chanukah home to his brothers. Paroah called him, Tzafnas Pa'aneach (Bereishis 41:45) which means the "(man through whom) the hidden is revealed." (Rashi, Onkeles)

As Yosef had interpreted, Egypt enjoyed seven years of plenty that were followed by years of terrible famine. However, the famine was not confined to Egypt; Canaan too ran out of food and the brothers were forced to go to Egypt in search of food that Yosef had stored during the years of plenty. The stage was set for the dramatic confrontation between Yosef and his brothers, who had not seen him for twenty-two years.

The entire famine that affected all the nations of the world at that time was to bring the brothers down to Egypt in search of food, in order to resolve their conflict. The entire history of the Jewish

people depended upon this resolution, for it was to prepare the way for the light of the Moshiach, and the entire history of the world for that matter. And once they arrived, and Yosef took note of their arrival, the process of resolution accelerated towards its climax.

Yosef saw his brothers and recognized them, and acted as a stranger towards them, speaking harshly, 'From where did you come?' They answered, 'From Canaan, in search of food.' Yosef recognized them, but they did not recognize him. (Bereishis 42:7)

Since they never saw the potential in Yosef to ever become what he had become . . . since they never saw the hand of G-d in his dreams and in all that occurred . . . because they only looked at the surface, which blinded them to that which was hidden.

And Yosef remembered his dreams that he had dreamed and said to them, "You are spies who have come to see where the land is vulnerable!" (Bereishis 42:8)

The accusation shocked the brothers, who took it at face value. They were caught off guard and put on the defensive, forced to clear their names. Had they been accustomed to looking beyond the surface for the truth, they may have broken Yosef's code. They may have caught on that Yosef, by accusing them of being "meraglim," was in fact revealing his hidden identity.

Meraglim (mem-raish-gimmel-lamed-yud-mem) is an acronym for "m'immi Rachel genavtem, l'Midianim Yishmaeling mecartem" - from my mother Rachel you stole me, to the Midianties and Arabs you sold me. (Bris Shalom)

Perhaps Yosef was testing them to see if their perspectives had changed. The fact that they could not understand his clue indicated that they had not, and therefore Yosef embarked upon a course that would dramatically disturb his brothers and eventually shock them into seeing the truth. As Yosef knew, there was no other way to correct what they had done wrong and to put Jewish history back on track.

On the defensive, the brothers felt compelled to tell Yosef about their family, which is what he wanted. This set the stage to bring Binyomin down to Egypt and replay the incident of the sale of Yosef. The brothers were given their supplies and the second oldest brother, Shimon, was kept as a guarantee that they would return with Binyomin, Yosef's brother from the same mother, to verify their story. The rest of the brothers were free to return, for as Yosef said,

I fear G-d. (Bereishis 42:18)

Another clue, perhaps.

The events of what had just occurred hit the brothers like a nightmare, which made the hand of G-d ever more obvious:

Each man said to his brother, "This is happening because we are transgressors, because we saw the suffering of our brother [Yosef twenty-two years earlier] and how he pleaded with us, yet we did not

pay attention to him." (Bereishis 42:21)

However, it wasn't until they reached the inn on their way back to Canaan, that they really felt like fugitives:

They loaded the food onto their donkeys and left. One of them opened his sack to feed his donkeys at an inn and saw his money at the top of his pack. Each one said to his brother, 'My money [with which I paid for the food] has been returned!' 'It's in my pack!' Their hearts sank. 'What is this that G-d has done to us?' they asked each other with trembling voices. (Bereishis 42:26)

In spite of this, it still did not occur to them that Yosef was behind everything. Their perspective did not permit them to see the hidden. In the meantime, they returned home to their father Ya'akov, who was still mourning the loss of Yosef - another sign that Yosef was still alive. They related what had happened, and delivered the horrible news that another son was missing.

Though they were prepared to return to Egypt to free Shimon by presenting their youngest brother as proof of their plea of innocence, Ya'akov would have nothing of it. Binyomin was the only remaining son of the wife he loved most (Rachel, Yosef's mother), who had died at age thirty-six. Why place this son in jeopardy?

Have a great Shabbos,
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