

DIVINE PROVIDENCE IN OUR TIMES

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

Parashas Tazria

G-d spoke to Moshe saying, "Speak to the Children of Israel and tell them that when a woman conceives and gives birth to a male she will become impure for seven days..." (Vayikra 12:1-2)

On the surface, it seems like an oxymoron. How can something as life-like as birth lead to something as death-like as spiritual impurity? The answer is the blood. Blood is life, physical life, and a loss of blood represents a loss of life. While Bris Milah on the eighth day celebrates the creation of physical life, the laws of spiritual impurity focus on the loss of physical life.

However, they also focus us on the potential loss of spiritual life as well. For, when G-d asked Adam HaRishon what he would call himself after successfully naming all the animals, he answered, "Adam." When asked why he said, "Because the 'aleph' of 'Adam' alludes to G-d, Who is 'One' (the letter 'aleph' represents the number one in gematria), and the 'Chief' ('aluph' means 'chief'), whereas the 'dalet-mem' of 'Adam' spells 'blood' (in Hebrew), alluding to man's physical component."

Thus, within the single word 'Adam' there is a simple but brilliant allusion to the two components of which man is composed: spirituality and physicality - soul and body. Thus, when a person achieves just the right mixture of both, then he becomes a true 'adam' in the fullest sense of the word, which is why the numerical value of 'adam' (1+4+40) is equal to the numerical value of the word for 'redemption' - geulah - (3+1+6+30+5), forty-five.

This is why the first plague in Egypt was that of blood. There were many ways that G-d could have stricken the Nile River and attacked the god of Egypt. However, He chose blood to simultaneously give the Jewish people of that time a crucial message for spiritual recovery:

"You are holding on the forty-ninth level of spiritual impurity. This means that you have discarded your soul in favor of your body, and you have abandoned spirituality in favor of materialism. In short, you have reduced the 'aleph' of 'Adam' to the point that it is not even visible to you anymore. Only the blood element of your name remains apparent, and redemption depends upon your reversing the trend and revitalizing the 'aleph' once again until it transforms the 'dumm' into 'Adam' once again, WHICH EQUALS REDEMPTION."

When the 'aleph' of 'adam' returns, then so too does the 'aleph' of 'vayikra' return, which we said represents the close and continuous relationship of a Jew with G-d (see Parashas Vayikra; also Rashi on Vayikra 1:1). Furthermore, so too does the 'aleph' of 'kisei' (throne) return, which Rashi says is the symbol of the defeat of the Jewish nemesis, Amalek (Shemos 17:16). They are all one and the same 'aleph,' alluded to by the laws of spiritual impurity at the beginning of this week's parshah.

So it was in Egypt. Rava said: So too will it be so in the Days of Moshiach (Sanhedrin 111a).

Their connection to the matter of birth and Bris Milah are not incidental. The essence of the bris that Avraham made with G-d through the blood of Bris Milah, and which the Jewish people reaffirmed through the blood of the Pesach-Offering whose blood was put on their doorposts Seder Night in Egypt, was to devote ourselves to the 'aleph' and all that it stands for: Torah, mitzvos, and derech erez (exemplary behavior), all of which leads to Kiddush Hashem - the sanctification of G-d's Holy Name.

The new child is born amidst blood reminding us that his heart is, from the beginning, "evil from his youth" (Bereishis 8:21). Entering him into the covenant of Avraham Avinu begins the process away from that post-natal state, in the direction of the 'aleph' and personal redemption. Torah education, with the help of G-d, is supposed to further that process to the point that he (or she) can bring himself (or herself) to the point that Adam's original intention in naming his own species becomes clear through the very person himself (or herself).

Shabbos Day:

G-d spoke to Moshe and Aharon saying, "When a man (adam) will have a rising in his flesh..." (Vayikra 13:1-2)

This section of the Torah is extremely important if only for its underlying message, which follows from the previous d'var Torah.

This section begins the laws of tzora'as, a physical infliction that was the result of a spiritual illness. There were a few reasons why a person might have been inflicted with this unique skin illness, which resembled leprosy only in physical terms, one of which was the serious transgression of speaking derogatorily about a fellow Jew. However, all those reasons aside, there is another message being transmitted here which is especially important for the Jewish people at this crucial and treacherous period of Jewish history, which seems to have just "sprung up" out of nowhere in so short a span of time.

Everything in existence is a function of Divine Providence. A fundamental of Torah belief is that G-d

recreates existence every single moment, which makes Him the Creator, Sustainer, and Maintainer of all that exists all the time. Part of the miracle of life is that it seems to flow from one moment to the next with some kind of consistency and continuity, allowing us to accomplish on a daily basis.

However, there is Divine Providence and then there is Divine Providence. This is what Dovid HaMelech was indicating when he wrote:

This is from G-d, that which is wondrous in our eyes. (Tehillim 118:23)

THIS is from G-d, only that which is wondrous in our eyes? Not true! Even that which we don't pay attention to is from G-d, so what does this mean? It means that of course everything is from G-d, but some events are even more supernatural indicating that G-d has moved from His covert position of guiding history to a more overt position of involvement in the affairs of man, and especially in the affairs of Jewish history.

Why and when does He do that?

The rule is the same for the individual, for the nation, and the world at large.

Though history seems to be one long, random run-on sentence, it is far from that. It is a master plan with specific goals and timetables and the One controlling it is Omnipotent, Omniscient, and extremely precise. He prefers to work in partnership with man, allowing him to take credit for the successes of creation and earn reward for eternity. However, whether or not man takes G-d up on His offer has always been, and remains to be, a matter of a person's own free choice, up to a limit, though.

The goals and timetables of creation supercede the need to give man a chance to rectify the world. Thus, when man ceases to adequately take advantage of the opportunity and time allotted to him to "earn his keep" then G-d Himself steps in to put things back on track and moving at the right speed in the right direction.

Hence, when history changes direction and momentum without any real logical reason forcing us to stand back and gawk, says Dovid HaMelech, that's your sign that G-d has taken hold of the reigns of history out of the hands of man. That's OUR sign that something big is happening, perhaps of Biblical proportions.

A person is inflicted with tzora'as to tell them that their 'aleph' is small, on both their 'adam' and 'vayikra.' Thus, by definition, the 'aleph' of 'kisei' is also small, opening the door for an attack by Amalek, who represents spiritual doubt and the severance of the closeness of relationship between a Jew and G-d. After that, he evolves into a real and ferocious enemy of the Jew.

If so, then 'tzora'as' is a merciful early warning system employed by G-d, a way of saying to the wayward Jew, "The path you are walking is leading you in a wrong and spiritually dangerous direction. Physical danger can only follow in its wake." It is a way of providing a little extra wake-up

time before the true consequences of the person's spiritual decline become inevitable.

Tzora'as, on a personal level, has a few forms and intensities. So does 'tzoros' - 'troubles,' and though they are spelled a little differently, they function in pretty much the same way as an early warning system to help us realize that we are overly involved in the 'dumm' aspect of life - materialism - and must quickly reverse the trend in the direction of an expanded 'aleph' - the world of spirituality.

Either we do it, or G-d Himself will.

SEUDAH SHLISHIS:

Parashas Metzora

G-d said to Moshe saying, "This will be the law of the Metzora on the day of his purification and he is brought before the kohen." (Vayikra 14:1-2)

Having said all of this, this section becomes even more vital because it represents the way out of the spiritual mentality that led to the physical sickness in the first place. We too, the Jewish people, are looking for a way out of our present dilemma, which has war raging in Israel, anti-Semitism rearing its ugly and dangerous head in Europe and Scandinavia, and threats to Jews living in America.

The first and most important point to make here is that the doctor is a kohen, and not an M.D. It is a doctor's job to deal with the external aspect of an affliction and thus he rarely addresses the person's personal Divine Providence that may have led to his current physical situation. Even if he is a doctor of 'internal medicine,' it is still called 'external' from a spiritual point of view.

However, the kohen is only interested in the physical manifestation of the illness insofar as it allows him to determine the spiritual nature of the illness. This allows the kohen to gain the insight he needs to spiritually direct the person on his way to a spiritual recovery, which will automatically result in a physical recovery.

How does he do this? He does this by applying the well-known principle that G-d 'punishes' measure-for-measure, specifically so that a person can trace the effects of his physical or spiritual infliction back to a spiritual cause. Then, if he rectifies the spiritual cause, the rest can take care of itself, meaning that the effects will disappear also as a result of Divine Providence.

Is it any different for the ENTIRE Jewish people for the tzoros they undergo?

No. Sometimes what we experience is simply 'tikun' - rectification - and all we can do is bear with it with as much as grace as we can muster. Our acceptance of G-d's Providence and our willingness to work with G-d at such times only magnifies the Kiddush Hashem, bringing light to the world and reward to the person.

However, if the enemy is prepared to blow themselves to pieces for their cause and we are hurt in the process, and measure-for-measure is the operating principle of history, then it can be a message from Heaven about our own lack of self-sacrifice for Torah, mitzvos, and Jewish causes.

If anti-Semitism is on the rise and our lives have become far less secure while living amongst our gentile hosts, then it can be a message that we have become overly attached to our host nations and have forgotten where our true allegiance lies. If symbols of our wealth and success are either damaged or destroyed, it can mean that they have become too powerful as icons of Jewish life in light of the goals of Torah.

Our situation today is extremely troubling. It has happened all so fast. It promises to get worse if something dramatic doesn't happen to change it all around soon. The people upon whose shoulders the turnaround rests either do not have the intelligence and will to bring it about, or the authority to do it, or both.

In other words, there is NO physical cure for the illness.

However, there is a spiritual cure for the illness, and if we take the illness apart piece-by-piece and understand its nature, applying the principles of Torah that we have inherited from our fathers of old, then perhaps we can wrestle the reigns of history back from G-d. It is something that He wants us to do and waits for, but if we don't approach this seriously now and the right way, there will come a time, G-d forbid, when such an opportunity to do so will no longer exist.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Series: Trust and Faith In G-d, Part 1

"When Moshe came to the Jewish people and told them, 'In this month you will be redeemed,' they answered him, 'Moshe Rabbeinu! How can we be redeemed? All of Egypt has been filthied by our idol worship!' So, he told them, 'Since the time for your redemption has arrived, He does not look at your idol worship, but rather He skips over mountains...'" (Shir HaShirim Rabbah, Chapter 2, Posuk 8, Siman 2)

We are told by the Talmud that there are two possible times that redemption can come, 'early' or 'on time' (Sanhedrin 98a). This we learn from the posuk in Yeshayahu:

The smallest shall become a thousand and the least, a mighty nation; I am the L-rd, in its time (b'ittah), I will hasten it (achishenah). (Yeshayahu 60:22)

Based upon this verse, the Talmud and Kabbalah teach that there is a last possible moment for him to come - b'ittah - and a potentially early moment - achishenah. At which of the two times he comes will depend upon the spiritual state of the Jewish people and the world around them.

If he comes early, we are told, it will be because mankind has, on its own, gained the appropriate realization of G-d and appreciation of His ways. If so, then Moshiach's entry into history will be smooth and pleasant, to help mankind and specifically the Jewish people finish the job they themselves began. If not, warn the prophets, then he will come at the last possible moment - to save us from the destructive effects of the war of wars, the War of Gog and Magog (Yechezkel 38:18-20, Zechariah 12-14, Yirmiyahu 30, Daniel 11-12, Yoel 4; Tehillim 83; Zohar, Shemos 7b; Sanhedrin 94a; Sha'arei Leshem p. 491).

Knowing this, we can have a better appreciation of the dialogue that took place between Moshe Rabbeinu and the Jewish people of that time.

Tradition had it that the exile in Egypt was supposed to last 400 years, presumably from the time that Ya'akov and his family first went down there to sojourn, to use the words of the Pesach Haggadah. However, when Moshe Rabbeinu showed up with the good news of an imminent redemption from that exile, only 209 years had passed since then.

It wasn't that they didn't believe that the redemption could not come early. As the Rambam would later teach, a Jew has to believe that Moshiach can come any day, a tradition that had existed long before the Rambam lived. However, the problem was that if Moshe Rabbeinu was right, then the redemption from Egypt was coming early - 190 years early and achishenah to be exact - which meant that it would be based upon great merits that the Jewish people knew they just didn't have.

In fact, not only did they lack sufficient merit to bring about the phenomenal miracle necessary to humble the mightiest nation on the face of the earth at that time, the prerequisite for leaving Egypt, but they had plenty of sin on their slates to boot! Thus they questioned Moshe:

"Moshe Rabbeinu! How can we be redeemed? All of Egypt has been filthied by our idol worship!"

However, Moshe's answer to them put everything into perspective and changed the entire atmosphere of that time:

"Since the time for your redemption has arrived, He does not look at your idol worship, but rather He skips over mountains, etc."

In other words, the redemption is not coming early, but it is coming at the last possible time, THE TIME meant for your redemption from Egypt according to the master plan for creation and the Creator's timetable, ever since the beginning of history. Therefore, it is not dependent upon merit or demerit, but rather upon the will of G-d Who is seeing to it that any unfinished business at this stage of history is taken care of one way or another.

What did Moshe Rabbeinu mean by that last statement? When Paroh increased their pain and suffering through impossible slavery, they found out what it means that G-d ties up all the spiritual loose ends we leave hanging when the time for redemption finally comes. At such a time in history, it doesn't come down to merit or demerit, but rather whatever G-d deems necessary to make the

redemption a reality (Sanhedrin 97b).

People ask the question, "What does G-d want from us at this time? Why isn't our Tehillim which is being said countless times by countless individuals and groups around the world, helping us at the time? There is more Torah learning going on today than there has been in a long time, and more anti-loshon hara campaigns than one can count! Why is the situation for the Jewish people getting worse and not better?"

The answer to this difficult and painful question may be 'b'ittah.' So late in history and with so many factors regarding the Final Redemption lining up like never before, what we consider to be an 'early redemption' and therefore one that is dependent upon our merits or demerits, may in fact be the moment of truth of all of history ever since creation began.

If so, then it will not be based upon what we do right or what we do wrong - THOUGH your PERSONAL judgment in Heaven WILL BE - but rather, what G-d deems necessary to rectify to pave the path for Moshiach. If that is the case, it will change the demand on every Jew at this very dramatic time in history, each according to his or her own level. However, in general, it will be an issue of trust and faith in G-d.

In essence, when Moshe Rabbeinu came to the Jewish people he told them, "Here comes the redemption, ready or not!" Of the fifteen million Jews who left Egypt, only three million were ready and saw the face of redemption. Through the events of today, Heaven may be issuing a similar statement, and if we learn anything at all from the Jews of the Egyptian exile, it is better to be ready.

Rava said: It will be similar in the Days of Moshiach. (Sanhedrin 111a)

NOW is the time to work on bitachon and emunah - trust and faith in G-d. We'll do that, G-d willing, over the next few weeks of PERCEPTIONS.

May we all have a peaceful Shabbos and hear only good news,
Pinchas Winston