

A FAIR HEARING

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

Yisro, the priest of Midian, Moshe's father-in-law, heard of all that G-d had done for Moshe and Israel His people, and that G-d had brought Israel out of Egypt. (Shemos 18:1)

Yisro was one of the earliest and most famous converts to Judaism. As Rashi points out, the emphasis on Yisro's hearing indicates that Yisro heard what happened for the Jewish people on a spiritual level as well as on a physical one. The events that had transpired to save the Jewish people from the once mighty Egyptians had a profound impact on him, and brought him to the point of converting to Judaism.

However, there was more to Yisro than his good sense of hearing, and more to him than the fact that he was the father-in-law of the greatest prophet that ever lived. In fact, all of that may not have been the true driving factor in Yisro's decision to become Jewish, as unfashionable as it was to become Jewish in his time. Indeed, as the Arizal reveals, there was something happening deep within Yisro, and it opened him up to the idea of joining his son-in-law's people and in accepting their G-d and His Torah:

With regard to the posuk, "If Kayin will be avenged (yud-kuf-mem) seven times . . ." (Bereishis 4:24), the head-letters (of avenged) yud-kuf-mem allude to Yisro, Kayin-Korach, and Mitzri (Egyptian). For, the Nefesh of Kayin, since it was greatly affected by the impurity of the snake, had its evil overcome its good and this resulted in the reincarnation into the gentile Egyptian (see Shemos 2:11). Moshe was Hevel, and he wanted to rectify him (Kayin) by killing him (the Egyptian) with G-d's Name - the 42-Letter Name - in order to separate out the evil from within him and bring the good to the side of holiness. At that point, it entered Yisro who had also been a gentile, and because of this he converted on the day that Moshe killed the Egyptian. Since this Nefesh was the level of evil within Kayin, it says in the Zohar that the beginning of the tikun of Kayin was through Yisro . . . (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, p. 124).

How fascinating and eye-opening! To begin with, if this is so, then Yisro converted much earlier than the Talmud and Rashi seem to indicate. Moshe killed the Egyptian long before he even knew that he was going to be chosen to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt, let alone bring them to Mt. Sinai to receive Torah. Moshe killed the Egyptian while he was still a young prince in the house Paroah!

We can then appreciate why Yisro's sense of hearing was so keen. It wasn't the events of leaving Egypt, or the splitting of the sea, or the conquering of Amalek that brought Yisro to the door of conversion. He had already crossed that threshold a long time before those events even became necessary. Rather, they strengthened and encouraged him to come out to the desert and to join up with a people to which he already belonged.

Even before Moshe first arrived in Midian and met his future wife by the local watering hole, her family had already moved in the direction of Torah. This must have made it easier for Moshe to move right in with Yisro and become part of his extended family. It would also explain why Yisro was prepared to accept Moshe's mission to save the Jewish people without contesting it at all.

If so, then wherein lay Yisro's greatness? The answer is simple. Every light requires a vessel to contain it, and not just any vessel, but a fitting vessel, one that CAN contain it and channel its light in the appropriate direction. In other words, Kayin's rectified soul didn't just fly into the first person it could find, but it came to a person who could contain it and channel it in the direction of rectification.

That was Yisro, the priest of Midian and the father-in-law of Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest prophet to ever live. As the Midrash teaches, Yisro had tried out all forms of idol worship and had rejected them all. He wasn't just looking for something to worship, he had been looking to worship the truth, and this transformed him into a fitting container for Kayin's rectified soul, and gave him the spiritual ears to hear the voice of G-d from within the Divine Providence that helped His people to freedom.

Shabbos Day:

G-d descended onto Mt. Sinai to the top of the mountain . . . (Shemos 19:20)

To appreciate what the sixth day of Sivan means to the Jewish people and the rest of the world, it is worthwhile to translate the words of Rav Tzaddok HaKohen in his phenomenal work, "Pri Tzaddik." He is speaking about Tu B'Shevat, but this section applies to the giving of the Torah as well.

It says that two loaves should be brought on Atzeres (Shavuot) in order that the fruit of the tree should be blessed (Rosh Hashanah 16a). Rashi explains that this is according to the opinion that the tree from which Adam HaRishon ate was wheat. According to everyone, before the sin, wheat was a kind of fruit that produced cakes, like what will happen in the future; there is no dissenting opinion on this, as the Tikunei Zohar says. However, what difference does it make if wheat was a kind of fruit before the sin since in our time it is no longer a species of tree? How does bringing two loaves of bread bring blessing to the fruits of the tree? The answer is that Atzeres is the time of the giving of the first set of tablets that rectified all damage and brought everything to the pre-sin level of the Tree of Life. Therefore, there is a mitzvah to bring two loaves of chometz bread because it is a time

that we are able to rectify the blemish of the se'or sh'b'issa (literally, "leaven in the dough," a reference to the yetzer hara), and make it "very good" (which is what it was called by G-d when it was created on the sixth day, according to the Midrash). In the Temple, every Shavuot the light of the giving of Torah emanated in order to rectify everything. Therefore, the two loaves of bread they offered in the Temple every Ateret had the status of a kind of fruit of the tree, just as wheat was before the sin. (Pri Tzaddik, Tu B'Shevat, 2)

One could argue that this was only true during Temple times, and that now the sixth of Sivan is just another holy day with some interesting traditions. However, as the Pri Tzaddik says elsewhere, as do many other commentators, it is not worth making the argument, because it is not true.

The Temple was not the reason for the light, just a spectacular way of focusing it and taking advantage of it. Thus, regardless of whether or not the Temple is standing and in use, Heaven opens up on the sixth of Sivan, every year, and emanates a special light that has the power to rectify creation and return it back to its full glory.

We know from the Talmud that the sixth day of Sivan is intricately tied to the purpose of creation from the following:

It was evening and it was morning, the sixth day (ha-shishi). (Bereishis 1:31)

THE SIXTH DAY: The letter "heh" (preceding the word "shishi") is extra . . . to hint that (G-d) made a condition with them (creation): If the Jewish people accept the Five Books of the Torah, then it is good; if not, then you will resort back to null and void. (Shabbos 88a)

In other words, the "sixth" also refers to the future sixth day of Sivan, 2,448 years after creation itself, and the extra "heh" whose numerical value is five alludes to the Five Books of Moshe. From the beginning of history, creation looked ahead to the day the Torah would be given and accepted by the Jewish people.

Now we can appreciate the following as well:

The offering of the Omer was to rectify the Divine Presence and Israel in this world every year. However, the main rectification will take place in the End-of-Days, and the redemption will begin on Pesach and end on the holiday of Shavuot. Then the Divine Presence will become completely revealed to Israel. (Sefer Dayah, Chelek 1, Drush 6, Siman 13:5)

The Omer-Offering is a reference to the mitzvah to bring an omer of barley each day to the Temple from the second day of Pesach for forty-nine days. On the fiftieth day, the sixth of Sivan, the two loaves of bread were brought, as the Pri Tzaddik spoke about above.

Of all the days that one would choose as the day for the final redemption, though Shavuot would not be the last choice, it would also not be the first one either. However, in light of what the Pri Tzaddik taught above, we can now understand why it ought to be the day of the redemption, for that

is when the light of rectification will be the strongest.

It's only Shevat now. Sivan is another five months away. We have what to look forward to, besides staying up all night to prepare ourselves for receiving Torah once again.

SEUDAH SHLISHIS:

Honor your father and your mother to lengthen your days on the earth which G-d, your G-d is giving to you. (Shemos 20:12)

One of the mitzvos that made the "top ten" is "Honor your father and mother." The basis of this mitzvah is said to be "hakores hatov": recognition of the good our parents did by giving us life. The Torah doesn't hold of this business of children kvetching, "I didn't ask to be brought into this world!" Whether we did or we didn't, it is still considered a gift to be alive for which we must show our constant appreciation. We do this by making the best of our lives and by not getting involved in meaningless activities.

The Talmud briefly describes the role of the parents in helping a child come into the world:

The rabbis taught: Three are partners in the creation of a person, The Holy One, Blessed is He, the father and the mother. >From the father comes the bones, the tendons, the nails, the brains in the head, and the white of the eye. From the mother come the skin, the flesh, the hair, and the black of the eye. The Holy One, Blessed is He, gives the spirit and the soul, the facial appearance, vision, hearing, speech, the ability to walk, understanding and discernment . . . (Niddah 31a).

However, the Arizal provides a deeper insight into this very central mitzvah, at least part of it:

A father gives a portion of his own soul to his sons, and that portion becomes "clothing" for the soul of his son, to help him and guide him down the proper path. For this reason, a son is obligated to honor his father. However, if there is less than five hundred levels difference between the soul of the father and that of the son, then the portion of the father's soul will remain the son's soul even in the time of Moshiach. Nevertheless, in Techiyas HaMeisim or the World-to-Come everything will return back to its root and separate completely. If, however, there is a separation of five hundred levels or more, then the lesser soul will be cancelled out by the greater soul, and an eternal bond will be created. They will never separate again and will be one root. That is in respect to a father and a son. Regarding a teacher and his student, we have already explained that a teacher gives some of his Ruach to his student, like a father does to a son. However, it is a more "dynamic" connection, lasting forever, b'sod, "The Nefesh of Yehonason became attached to the Nefesh of Dovid" (I Shmuel 18:1). This is why more respect is due to a teacher than a father. If the student is also the son of the teacher, then the son is connected to him because the father is his teacher, and because he is his son. Therefore, if there is more than five hundred levels between them, then the two of them will join

together, the father with his son because he is his teacher, and the son with his father because he is his father. The two of them will join together because of these two levels. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 10)

This may sound like a contradiction to the Talmudic teaching above, which attributed all spiritual qualities (soul, speech, etc.) of a child to G-d only. However, really it is not because it is G-d who arranges all of this, not the father himself. When G-d gives the soul to a new born child, He uses parts of the father's own soul, though losing these parts takes nothing away from the father.

Perhaps this is why, as I have heard many mothers complain, that even though the mother carries the child for nine months, the child quickly develops a strong bond with the father. It is not that the child does not appreciate what his mother did for him in the process of giving him life, rather there is a soul-like bond with the father from before birth.

What about the mother? It is the mother who will raise and nurture the child through its most important years and in doing so, develop a tremendous bond of love with the son or daughter. As the rabbis teach, honoring one's mother is often easier than honoring one's father, and fearing one's father is often more natural than fearing one's mother. This helps to explain why.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Chanukah & The Wonderful World of Thirty-Six

Installment #9, Chapter Seven, Part One: Moshe & The Nation

A man from the House of Levi married a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and gave birth to a son. She saw that he was good and hid him for three months. (Shemos 2:1)

When Moshe was born, the house was filled with light. It is written here, "She saw that he was good" and there it is written, "G-d saw the light, that it was good." (Sotah 12a)

The fact that the same word describing the Hidden Light of creation ("good") is also used to describe Moshe himself, may, on the surface, seem insignificant. However, the rabbis saw in this a connection between the Supernal light and Moshe Rabbeinu, the future leader of the Jewish people.

What makes this connection even more significant is the date of Moshe's birth: 2368 from creation - THIRTY-SIX years after Egyptian bondage actually began in 2332, after the death of Levi (2331), the last of Yosef's brothers to die. Furthermore, just as the light of creation was hidden after shining for thirty-six hours, the light that was revealed through the birth of Moshe after thirty-six years of enslavement was also hidden.

From an early age, the Torah reveals, Moshe had access to the light of Chanukah. Though he grew up in the house of Paroah, free of the problems of his brothers in the fields, he still chose to go out

among them and empathize with them. It was on one such excursion that he saw an Egyptian beating a Jew.

He saw an Egyptian hitting a fellow Jew. He looked there and there, and when he saw that no one else was around, he smote the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. (Shemos 2:12)

HE LOOKED THERE AND THERE: He saw what he (the Egyptian) did in the house and what he did in the field; HE SAW THAT NO ONE ELSE WAS AROUND: That no one would come from him who would convert. (Rashi)

According to Rashi, Moshe's vision extended beyond what the eye could physically see. The Midrash states that the reason why the Egyptian beat the Jew is because he had been with the Jew's wife, and now he wished to do away with her husband who knew what had happened. Moshe, through prophetic vision, was able to see this.

According to Jewish law, this was reason enough to kill the Egyptian, and any Jewish judge would have had no second thoughts about carrying out such a punishment had he been in a position to do so. However, Moshe hesitated: Though a normal "judge only has what his eyes can see" (Bava Basra 131a), Moshe was able to see into the past and the future while standing in the present.

Moshe saw with the Chanukah-vision, as the verse states, "He looked there and there - koh v'koh," with each "koh" equaling twenty-five, alluding to the twenty-five of Chanukah. This is exactly what the Hidden Light provides, a view beyond the immediate physical appearance of situations and things. In this way, the true hidden potential of anything can be revealed.

The darkness of exile achieves one thing specifically: distance between Jew and G-d. The longer the exile, the greater the distance between the two, until the closeness becomes all but a faded memory. The more painful the exile, the more doubt infects the mind of the Jew regarding the special relationship between G-d and the Jewish people, a relationship that is symbolized by the Menorah (Shabbos 22b).

Chanukah comes every year and proclaims: Look not only at the present moment, at the surface of events and things. Look beyond what the eye perceives: Look at what was once in the past and what is promised for the future, and use this to buoy yourself through the rough waters of the present. This is the basis of the longevity of Jewish faith, a faith that for any other people with a similar history would have disappeared long ago.

It is through a historical perspective that incorporates all relevant issues - past, present, and future - that the Hidden Light of creation comes alive, through the thirty-six ner shel Chanukah. Moshe was hand-picked by G-d Himself to reveal this message. In fact, according to tradition, Moshe taught the entire Torah to the Jewish people within thirty-six days (Seder Olam 10)!

The Menorah, the symbol of Chanukah, represents the understanding that lies below the surface. When G-d would teach Moshe a new law, He would speak to him from on top of the Kapores over

the Holy Ark, within which the Written Law had been placed. However, for the explanation of the law, Moshe turned southward towards the Menorah (HaEmek Davar).

(Continued next week, b"H.)

Have a great Shabbos,
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