

ZU L'UMUS ZU

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

The entire nation of Israel reached the Tzin desert in the first month. The people camped in Kadesh, and that is where Miriam died and was buried. There was no water for the people, and they gathered against Moshe and Aharon. (Bamidbar 20:1-2)

Another one of those Torah ironies is about to occur. We are told that the well that followed the Jewish people in the desert for 40 years and that supplied all the water needs of the nation had been in Miriam's merit. Hence, its name" B'e'er Miriam - the Well of Miriam.

What had Miriam done to be the source of this great miracle and fountain of life? The Midrash explains that it was Miriam who had watched baby Moshe after he had been placed in his basket and in the Nile river to avoid being killed by the Egyptians. She looked out for him, to make sure no harm would come to Moshe, who she knew would be the future redeemer of the Jewish people.

After all, Miriam had been a prophetess, even at the tender age of 7 (Shemos 15:20, Seder Olam 3). It was Miriam who had advised her father to re-marry her mother in order to have more children, from which Moshe was born (Sotah 12a). "Pharaoh only decreed against males," she told her father, the leader of the generation, "while you have decreed against the females as well by not having any children at all."

Upon hearing her rationale, Amram her father kissed her on the head. However, says the Talmud, when they were forced to put Moshe into the river to save his life, Amram tapped her on the head and questioned her advice. Undaunted, she stayed with her opinion and went to the Nile river to see what G-d had in mind for the future redeemer.

Thus, for her concern on behalf of her people, she was blessed with being the merit for the water that "redeemed" that same people in the desert from death. And, as Rashi points out in this week's parshah, the well stopped producing its water just to make sure that everyone knew that the water had been on her behalf.

Here comes the irony.

Because the water dried up on Miriam's behalf, Moshe was forced to make it reappear in his own merit, which eventually he did. However, not until doing so led to the Divine decree against him to

die in the desert, sealing his fate not to be the final redeemer of Israel, at least at that time in history. It had been Miriam that led to the life of the future redeemer of Israel, and it was Miriam's death that led to his demise.

Not only that, but the whole point of the story of Miriam is the idea of seeing past the obvious and realizing the Hashgochah Pratis that lies behind the event. Her father had held off having children after Pharaoh decreed to kill the newly born Jewish males. Miriam recognized that her father was denying the Jewish people their future redeemer.

When they were forced to abandon Moshe to the Nile river, Amram saw it as a disaster and regretted having given birth to another child. Miriam, on the other hand, saw it as a curious progression on the path of making a savior. Not bad for a girl whose very name was a statement about the bitter (mar) exile!

Thus, Be'er Miriam had been more than just a fountain of sustaining water; it had been a symbol of G-d's ongoing protection of the Jewish people. It represented the silver lining inside every gray cloud of Jewish history. If so, how could it be the very vehicle to do Moshe in, who hit the rock specifically because he misunderstood the Divine Providence of the situation?

Shabbos Day:

Who is wise and will understand these things; [who is] understanding and will know them? For the ways of G-d are straight; the righteous walk in them and sinners will stumble over them. (Hoshea 14:10)

The book of Hoshea is one of the shortest in Tanach. However, it also contains tremendous insights, many of which are very Kabbalistic in nature. But, perhaps its most profound insight is its parting words, just quoted.

If you contemplate the final posuk, you might wonder why it is. For, we tend to think of life as being composed of two paths, and one that leads to good and one that leads to evil. The righteous people are always those who walk the good path, whereas the evil people are those who walk the path to evil.

No, says the prophet. Life is but ONE path only, walked by righteous and evil alike. However, something very curious happens when one walks it: depending upon one's character traits, the path can either allow a person to proceed in life, or cause him to stumble. One path, two possible outcomes.

The Kabbalistic term for this idea is "zu l'umas zu" - which corresponds to this. According to Kabbalah, when G-d made creation, this was a major operation principle, and therefore for everything in creation that is good, there is something evil. And, if it can be very good, then it can also be very evil.

In fact, I heard this idea used to answer a question from Parashas Shlach, when the spies came back with the huge cluster of grapes. According to Rabbi Moshe Shapiro, shlita, the point of bringing back such wondrous fruit was to support the spies' argument, not to knock it down; they were meant to scare the people, not to impress them.

What was their point? It was to say, "Look how wondrous the land is! Look at the type of fruit it can produce! It must be an exceedingly holy place if it can produce such miraculous fruit, and therefore living there must have the potential to make a person quite holy. However," and this was the point the spies' had built towards, "as we all know, if something has the potential to be the source of such tremendous growth, it can also be the source of tremendous downfall. And, with tremendous downfall comes tremendous Divine retribution! Let's stay in the desert where it is spiritually safe. We may not grow the same amount out here, but at least we can't fall to the same depths as we can in Eretz Yisroel!"

According to Rabbi Shapiro, even Moshe Rabbeinu had a tough time accepting the idea that something so holy could end up being something so impure. Where did we see this? Here:

Moshe complained, "They will not believe me, or listen to me. They will say 'G-d did not appear to you.' " G-d asked him, "What is that in your hand?" He answered, "A staff." He said, "Throw it to the ground," and [Moshe] threw it to the ground. It became a serpent, and Moshe ran away from it. (Shemos 4:1-3)

Asked Rabbi Shapiro: Why did Moshe run away from the serpent? Surely someone as great as Moshe Rabbeinu wasn't afraid of a snake, especially in the presence of G-d. Indeed, Rebi Chanina ben Dosa even put his foot over the opening of a snake hole allowing it to bite him, saying, "It is not snakes that kill, but sin that kills" (Brochos 33a).

Rabbi Shapiro explained that what disturbed Moshe was not the actual snake itself, but that his staff - which had the Ineffable Name of G-d written on it, and with which he had performed so many miracles and had constantly sanctified the Name of G-d - could become such a symbol of extreme impurity! THAT scared Moshe Rabbeinu.

That is also what scared off the spies and those who fell for their words. However, as G-d told them, by rejecting Eretz Yisroel and the system of "zu l'umas zu, they were in fact rejecting G-d Himself, for to not grow is to descend; there is no such thing as "maintaining the status quo" when it comes to the growth of a Jew. You are either going up or going down, and to not go up as quickly as you can, is to go down.

SEUDAH SHLISHIS:

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was in the center of the garden. (Bereishis 2:9)

This helps to explain the punishment of the generation of the spies, who had to wander an additional 39 years before entering Eretz Yisroel. But for accepting loshon hara? Doesn't G-d punish measure-for-measure? Where is the measure-for-measure in a punishment of 40 years of wandering for one-half hour of accepting loshon hara?

The answer is, that wasn't the punishment for the loshon hara. This was the punishment for the loshon hara:

As for the men whom Moshe sent to search the land, who re-turned and made all the congregation complain because of their evil report of the land, they died by a plague from G-d. (Bamidbar 14:36-37)

BY A PLAGUE: By that death which was fitting for them - measure-for-measure. They had sinned with their tongue, therefore their tongue grew long to their navels, and worms came from their tongue and entered their navels. (Rashi)

If so, then for what did the nation suffer "one year for each day" of spying the land. Measure-for-measure, for each day of rejecting the Land of Israel, the Land of Israel will reject you for one year. For each day that you feared the growth process that brings you closer to Me, for 40 years I will ignore you in the desert, which G-d did until the last of that generation that sinned had died. Then prophecy returned to Moshe once again.

It's like the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. There were not TWO trees, one that was good and one that was evil. That would make their good or evil intrinsic to their very being. Rather, there was only ONE tree that could be used for both, either good or evil.

What was the determining factor that decided the outcome for the tree with two potentials? Adam's free-will, for good or evil is not a term that is used to evaluate the inanimate world, but the term that is exclusively used to evaluate the moral value of a free-will choice, for the following reason:

The Holy One, Blessed is He, gave a portion of His glory to flesh-and-blood, to make him a partner with Him in creation . . . And, just as The Holy One, Blessed is He, created everything according to His will and without being compelled, G-d forbid, likewise He gave this possibility to man as well, by allowing him to act and perform according to his own will. This was accomplished through the creation of good and evil. For had The Holy One, Blessed be He, created only good, man would be compelled to act [in a good way only], and there would be no purpose for any of the abilities that were given to him . . . (Sha'arei Leshem, page 76)

The Ramchal adds:

As we have discussed, man is the creature created for the purpose of being drawn close to God. He is placed between perfection and deficiency, with the power to earn perfection. Man must earn this perfection, however, through his own free will and desire. If he were compelled to choose perfection, then he would not actually be its master, and God's purpose would not be fulfilled. It was

therefore necessary that man be created with free will. Man's inclinations are therefore balanced between good and evil, and he is not compelled toward either of them. He has the power of choice, and is able to choose either side, knowingly and willingly, as well as to possess whichever one he wishes. Man was therefore created with both a Good Urge (Yetzer Tov) and an Evil Urge (Yetzer Hara). He has the power to incline himself in whichever direction he desires. (Derech Hashem, 1:3:1)

Therefore, the physical world was made neutral, left for man to determine how it would be used. One world, two possibilities, and man is the one to determine whether or not he walks that path, or stumbles it in. But, try it he must, for that is what he was created to do.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Moshe and Aharon assembled the congregation before the rock, and he said to them, "Listen you rebels! Should we bring forth water from this rock?!" (Bamidbar 20:10)

Many questions arise from the pshat of the account of Moshe's hitting the rock, especially since Moshe had done all he had been told from the outset. According to the Midrash, Moshe had first spoken to the rock as directed by G-d, but it had refused to bring forth water.

According to Sod, the problem had been Moshe's anger. Why did Moshe get so angry? Because, He had seen the Divine Presence ascend and leave the rock that had been Be'er Miriam, usually a sign of Divine displeasure. What could Moshe assume other than G-d was furious with the Jewish people who seemed to always find a pretext to complain?

That had not been the case. Apparently, the Divine Presence had left the rock, but only to let Moshe Rabbeinu himself choose which rock from which water should come. Once Moshe had chosen the rock, then G-d would have returned to that rock and water would have flowed anew, a great sanctification of G-d's Name, and a beautiful way to show the Jewish people how much G-d wants to do their will.

As the Midrash explains, G-d told Moshe, "When you get angry, they think I am angry, which is not the case. You misrepresented Me, and of that you have to suffer the consequences!"

One situation, two possible outcomes, and Moshe stumbled.

Amazingly, the words "hamin hasela" - from this rock - have the exact same gematria as the words, "hamin ha'aitz" - from this tree (Bereishis 3:9) - that G-d addressed of Adam after he ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This hints to the similarity of the lesson that each teaches.

And, what does G-d tell Moshe? He says:

Since you did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the Children of Israel, therefore you will

not bring this assembly into the land which I have give them. (Bamidbar 12)

To whom were these words spoken? They were spoken to Moshe and Aharon, but they could have just as easily been spoken to the spies, because it was the same scenario all over again. However, before we go and blame Moshe and Aharon for this catastrophic result, we must consider the following:

When [Rebi Yochanan ben Zakkai] arrived [at the Roman camp], he said, "Peace unto you, king! Peace unto you, king!"

[General Vespasian] answered him, "You are now deserving of death twice. Firstly, I am not the king and yet you have called me king. Secondly, if I am the king, why did you not come to me earlier?" He answered, "I called you king because one day you will be, for, if you weren't a king then Jerusalem would not have been given over to you, as it says, 'And the Levanon will fall by a mighty (adir)' (Yeshayahu 10:34). Now, 'mighty' (adir) refers to a king, as it says, 'And the leader (adir) shall be of themselves' (Yirmiyahu 30:21). 'Levanon' refers to the Temple, as it says, 'This goodly mountain and the Levanon' (Devarim 3:25). As to your question, that if you were a king why did I not come to you earlier, it was because the rebels among us prevented me from leaving." However, Vespasian responded, "If there is a barrel full of honey and a serpent is around it, is it not proper to break the barrel because of the serpent?" Rabbi Yochanan could not answer. Rav Yosef, and others say Rebi Akiva, applied the following posuk to him, "Who makes wise men retreat and makes their knowledge foolish" (Yeshayahu 44:25). [For, Rebi Yochanan] should have answered, "It is better to take tongs and remove the serpent from the barrel and kill it, and leave the barrel intact." (Gittin 56a)

A troubling tract of Talmud, one that can easily be abused and thrown into question, G-d forbid, the authority of Torah leaders. Is not Emunas Chachamim - faith in Torah leaders - based upon our belief that God is with them, assisting our Torah leaders in their decision-making for the best of the Jewish people? How could God have denied Rebi Yochanan such an important answer at such a crucial moment, and how often does this happen in Jewish history?

The Maharshah explains:

In other words, the sin of the people of the city was the cause for The Holy One, Blessed is He, to "make wise men retreat," denying them the knowledge to answer. (Maharshah, q.v. Who makes wise men retreat)

In other words, explains the Maharshah, Rabbi Yochanan's silence was not due to any shortcoming of his own. Rather, his inability to answer correctly at that moment was the result of the people he had left behind. Indeed, from elsewhere we see that a Torah leader's Heavenly help is a direct function of the people they lead:

"God told Moshe: Go down" (Shemos 32:7); what does "go down" mean? Rebi Elazar said, "The Holy One, Blessed is He, told Moshe, 'Descend from your [level of] greatness, for I have given you

greatness only for the sake of Israel, and now Israel has sinned.' Immediately, Moshe became weak and he lost the strength to speak." (Brochos 32a)

Why didn't the people get angry at the spies, and stop them from speaking instead? Had they really wanted to enter Eretz Yisroel and trusted in G-d, would they not have seen the spies as blasphemers?

Likewise, why did Moshe fail to see the true reality of the situation, and instead err by the rock? After all, as the Talmud says, if G-d looks out for the animals of the righteous, how much more must He spare the righteous from making unwitting mistakes?

That is, unless the people themselves are looking for a pretext to not succeed. Thus, it turns out, that not only can someone like Moshe Rabbeinu "stumble" along the path of G-d, but He - and all leaders for that matter - can do so as a result of the nation's own ability to walk G-d's straight and narrow.

Have a great Shabbos,
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