

THE EYE GENERATION

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

How can I alone carry your contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels? (Devarim 1:12)

Here we are again, approaching the end of the Three Weeks as Tisha B'Av approaches. It will come and go, and hopefully it will be the last one, which can only be the case if the third and final Temple is built this year, may it happen soon in our days. In any case, Rosh Hashanah, the Aseres Yemai Teshuvah, and Yom Kippur are now just around the corner.

For a long time it has always impressed me how the Jewish people, when the summer time comes, go in the opposite direction from the rest of the world. For the most part, once the warm weather rolls around, the gentile world heads for the world of leisure. Granted people have to work even in the summer time, but still, there is an atmosphere of leisure just about everywhere one goes during the summer months.

On the other hand, the Torah world receives the summer months in a state of national mourning. If only the Temples could have been destroyed in the winter months, when death is a common theme anyhow. Well, that's Divine Providence for you, always making sure that the Jewish people keep their priorities straight, something you have to do on a consistent basis if you want to maximize your portion in the World-to-Come.

Ah, right, the World-to-Come, the end-game of all of history. No one we know has been there, at least no one we know who can talk about it, so it remains to be a matter of faith. It is, without a doubt, the ultimate leisure resort, but you won't need sunscreen there, nor shades for your eyes either. It will be a place of inexperienced pleasure, to limits beyond our wildest imaginations, which will make all of our physical self-sacrifice far more worth it.

Alas, it is a hard sell. This is what Tisha B'Av reminds us of each year, and this is really what we are mourning. For, the Temple was not the goal, but the means, a way of staying in touch with the ultimate purpose of Torah and mitzvos. To look at and to experience the Temple was to become re-focused on the ultimate destination of the Jew, and to make physical desires secondary to our true spiritual aspirations.

Jewish temples are destroyed when the reverse sets into the Jewish national psyche. The Torah was given to the Jewish people to bridle our desires, to channel them in the service of G-d, to help us

make physical pleasure a by-product, not an end until itself. This is what the Talmud really means when it says:

Had the Torah not been given to Israel, no nation or people could stand before them. As Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: "There are three who are brazen: Israel among the nations . . ." (Beitzah 25b)

The posuk above from this week's parshah begins with the Hebrew word "Eichah," the same word with which Lamentations begins, which is intoned on the night of Tisha B'Av. Thus, when reading this posuk, the reader does so with the same sad melody used for Eichah on Tisha B'Av.

Just a friendly reminder of what is coming up in the following week? Or, is there a stronger connection between Moshe's complaint in this week's parshah and Yirmiyahu's in Eichah? And, while we're at it, we might as well inquire about the connection of both to G-d's one-word question to Adam HaRishon after he ate from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil: Aiyekah - spelled the exact same way as eichah.

SHABBOS DAY:

. . . Contentiousness, your burdens, and your quarrels? (Devarim 1:12)

Moshe does not sound so positive here. Yes, we are G-d's chosen people and yes, we are a nation of priests. However, we also happen to be contentious, burdensome, and quarrelsome. What did he mean by all of that?

HOW CAN I ALONE CARRY: If I were to say, "I will do so in order to receive reward for it," I cannot do so. This is what I have already told you: Not on my own do I tell you that I am not able to bear you, but at the request of the Holy One, Blessed is He. **YOUR CONTENTIOUSNESS:** Moshe's use of this word teaches us that the Jewish people were troublesome. If one of them saw that his opponent in a law suit was about to be victorious in the case, he would say, "I have witnesses to bring . . . further proof to adduce . . . I will add judges to you who are sitting." **YOUR BURDENS:** This teaches that they were heretics (they treated the judges with little respect): if Moshe left his tent early, they would say, "Why does the son of Amram leave so early? Perhaps, he is not at ease at home?" If he left late, they would say, "What do you think? He is sitting and devising evil schemes against you, and is plotting against you." **YOUR QUARRELS:** This teaches that they were always litigious (Siphre). (Rashi, Devarim 1:12)

There is one word for all this: subjectivity. Objective people are not usually burdensome people, subjective people are. They are rarely, if ever at all, contentious. Rather, they care only about one thing, and that is the best solution for a problem, or rather, the most **TRUTHFUL** solution for a problem. They do not speak out of two sides of their mouth, so-to-speak, claiming to be concerned only with Torah and mitzvos, while at the same time breaking them to get the best personal deal. Objective people are true B'nei Olam HaBah, people whose whole focus is on getting to the World-to-Come.

Thus, what Moshe Rabbeinu was reporting in this week's parshah was really a warning that bad seeds were being planted in the ground of Jewish history. Just like Yosef, when he called his brothers "spies," had really been warning them about the potential error of the future spies, so too was Moshe Rabbeinu warning the Jewish people of impending doom if they did not stop being contentious.

How . . . She (Jerusalem) sits in solitude . . . (Eichah 1:1)

How can I alone carry . . . (Devarim 1:12)

They are really one and the same question, and they mean:

HOW did you become so unfocussed? HOW were you able to make success in this mundane, temporary reality such a priority as to sell yourself out, and your nation as well? HOW could you let things get so bad, that they could descend to this level, leaving you so incredibly desolate? HOW could it even have been worth it?

HOW could you, Adam HaRishon, who had been created on such a high level of spiritual consciousness that you could talk to G-d on a personal basis, and even confuse the angels into thinking that you were G-d yourself, make such a simple error as to eat from a forbidden tree?

Granted, had Adam HaRishon possessed a yetzer hara internally, as we all do since his sin, it might have been understandable. As Shlomo HaMelech taught, even righteous people sin from time to time (at least in terms of what G-d expects from them). However, Adam HaRishon had been free of an internal yetzer hara, which in his time was only inside the snake itself.

As they say in the yeshivos: It's a kasha (difficult question)!

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

G-d commanded the Man, saying, "You may eat from every tree in the Garden, except from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. On the day you eat you shall surely die . . ." (Bereishis 2:16-17)

The instructions seemed quite simple and explicit, leaving little room for error. However, just to make sure that nothing could go wrong, Adam even told Chava that the prohibition included touching the tree, just to make sure that she could not come within a distance that would make eating from the tree possible.

What about LOOKING at the tree, was that prohibited also? And, even if G-d's commandment did not include looking at the tree, wouldn't it have been a good idea anyhow to avoid visual contact with the tree. After all, as the Talmud warns:

The yetzer hara only has power when the eyes have seen. (Sotah 8a)

And, indeed, it has been revealed:

The third aspect [of the prohibition concerning the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil] is that the Seichel (Mind) and the Da'as (Knowledge) are also spoken of in terms of "eating," as we see in Yechezkel, "Eat this scroll . . . And He fed me that scroll . . . Feed your stomach and fill your innards with this scroll . . . So I ate, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth" (Yechezkel 3:1-3). Likewise, we find in Yeshayahu, "Go, buy, and eat; go and buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Yeshayahu 55:1). We find similar examples in Chazal, where they compared the words of Torah to water, wine, oil, and honey (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 81). Thus, the Seichel and the Da'as are also referred to in terms of eating, and the warning was also: Do not contemplate or glance at anything with which evil is associated. It is crucial to not look at the ability of the Chitzonim (spiritual impurities) themselves, to investigate them even to learn how powerful they are, so that you are not seduced after them. For, it is the nature of a person to be drawn after that which he contemplates, for the Seichel, the thinker, and that which is being understood become one. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 441)

In other words, there is a natural union that occurs between the beholder and the beholden, even when forbidden by the Torah. It is quite automatic and often quite insidious, but eventually it can and often does lead to a terrible sin, as it did with Adam HaRishon.

The Leshem continues:

Therefore, there is great danger in looking at and contemplating anything to which evil is attached, and how much more so at the Chitzonim themselves; it is very precarious to follow after them, like a sheep going to the slaughter. This is what it says, "For, the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her palate is smoother than oil" (Mislei 5:3). (Ibid.)

The "forbidden woman," obviously, is a metaphor for heretical thinking, which can be very seductive and destructive, even if only being looked at for the sake of understanding it.

The Torah, likewise, gives testimony [to this ideal] when it says, "For, the tree was desirable to the eyes, and the tree was pleasing to understand (Bereishis 3:6) . . . (Ibid.)

Thus, knowledge is spoken about as if it were something to be consumed.

"But her end is as bitter as wormwood," and "on the day you eat you shall surely die," because it is death itself. (Ibid.)

The first quotation is the conclusion of the posuk from Mishlei quoted above, whereas the second posuk was the warning from G-d to Adam HaRishon. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, here is being compared to a forbidden, but seductive woman, and the destruction of each is the same: death.

. . . This was the essence of the prohibition and sin of the Tree of Knowledge, against which The Holy One, Blessed is He, warned Adam HaRishon. It was in this that he stumbled and sinned, and though in the beginning it was accidental, in the end, it was pure negligence, as we will explain. (Ibid.)

Thus, in conclusion, though Adam approached the tree at first only to understand it, even to overcome it - good reasons to be sure - in the end, he was dragged down by it. It is this that lowered him and which MADE POSSIBLE his eating; it gave him the potential to rebel.

MELAVE MALKAH:

So says G-d: After SEVENTY years of Bavel are completed, I will remember you and fulfill My good word concerning you, to return you to this place. (Yirmiyahu 29:10)

I, Daniel, pondered in the books the number of years of the word of G-d that came to Yirmiyahu the prophet regarding the completion of the destruction of Yerushalayim: SEVENTY years. (Daniel 9:2)

Thus, as the Talmud teaches, it all begins with the eyes, with AYIN. Ayin, of course, is the Hebrew word for "eye," and it is also the name of the 16th letter of the Aleph-Bais, which represents the number 70-the number of years for which the Jewish people were exiled after the destruction of the First Temple.

The 70 years of exile came to an end with the death of Haman, the chief antagonist in the Purim story, whose rise and fall occurred in 70 days, recorded in 70 verses in Megillas Esther. He, of course, was the direct descendant of Amalek, whose name means: AYIN-malak (AYIN-mem-lamed-kuf) the "severed eye." The holiday of Purim is all about ayin and the number 70.

Indeed, 70 is the number of nations that emerged from Noach after the Flood, from which all the nations of the world have descended one way or another, except for the Jewish people. The Jewish nation is the 71st nation, and our language is the 71st language, the one which Pharaoh could not learn.

In fact, 70 is the number of days of the week, times 10. This is because each of the seven days of the week are rooted in one of seven sefiros, Chesed through Malchus, each of which have 10 sefiros of their own, in an ideal state. Thus, each of the days of the week represent 10 sefiros, making 70 altogether, which are the root of the nations of the world.

Thus, 70 is the number that represents this world, and if so, then Amalek can also mean, "severing of 70," or the cutting off of this world. In other words, it is Amalek's raison d'etre to make this world, Olam HaZeh, an independent reality, severed from Olam HaBa, the World-to-Come. This way, everyday life ceases to be a means to an end, but an end unto itself.

This is why Amalek, when they attacked the Jewish people after they had left Egypt, severed the Bris Milah of those Jews they could reach. Bris Milah symbolizes the connection of the Jew to the World-to-Come, and whether Amalek actually performed the physical surgery or not is second to the point that they performed a spiritual surgery, severing the Jews from the absolute belief in the World-to-Come. After all, the gematria of Amalek is equal to the Hebrew word for "doubt" (suffek).

Thus, when the Talmud asks:

Where is there an allusion to Haman in the Torah? In the verse, "Did you eat from (heh-mem-nun) the tree?" (Chullin 139b)

It was not just playing with words. It was Adam HaRishon's eyes that led to his sin, that led to his doubt, that led to the reality of Amalek, which resulted, eventually, in Haman, a man whose very being represented the result of Jews losing their connection to the World-to-Come.

Thus, when the Talmud says elsewhere:

Rav said, "All the dates of redemption have already passed, and now it depends upon repentance and good deeds." Shmuel said, "It is enough that the mourner remains in mourning!" This is like an earlier disagreement: Rebi Eliezer said, "If Israel will repent then they will be redeemed, and if they will not, then they will not." Rebi Yehoshua said to him, "If they do not repent they will not be redeemed?! Rather, The Holy One, Blessed is He, will cause to rise a king who will make decrees as difficult as Haman's were and Israel will repent and return to the right path." (Sanhedrin 97b)

Why Haman? Why only Haman? There have been plenty of anti-Semites throughout history who have carried out far greater atrocities against the Jewish people than Haman had been able to do before his downfall. Why bring him up as the example for the End-of-Days, if not to tell us that the problem with the Jewish people at the end of days will be like the problem with the Jewish people when the two Temples were destroyed: the eyes, the severed vision; the living in this world as if it is an end unto itself, until it actually becomes the end of itself!

That was the effect of Adam HaRishon's looking at the tree, and that is the answer to Yirmiyahu's question, how? And, it was the reason why Moshe's generation was so burdensome, for when one severs himself from the reality of the World-to-Come, the "gravity" of Olam HaZeh has complete power over him, weighing him down, so-to-speak, in everyday mundane concerns.

May Tisha B'Av be turned from a day of mourning into one of joy with the completion of exile and the arrival of redemption.

Have a great Shabbos,
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