

IMMACULATE DECEPTION

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

When Yehudah saw her, he thought her to be a harlot since she covered her face. So he detoured to her by the road and said, "Come, if you will, let me consort with you," for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. (Bereishis 38:15-16)

Thus begins one of the most bizarre accounts on the way to building the road to Moshiach, and the eventual Final Redemption. There was Yehudah, just after the death of his own wife, out shearing his sheep when he chanced upon his own daughter-in-law, Tamar, to whom he had denied the right to marry the surviving brother of her two dead husbands. Even his name, "Shelah" implied that he belonged to her, for the name itself means, "hers."

She, for her part, was acting only on behalf of Heaven. She knew royalty was to emerge from the House of Yehudah, and she sensed that she still had a role to play in the process. History bore out the truth, when she later gave birth to twins from her father-in-law: Peretz from whom King David would descend, and his brother Zerach.

What was Yehudah doing in all of this? How could he consort with what he perceived to be a harlot, especially so close after the death of his own wife?

According to the Midrash, he was minding his own business, but he noticed Tamar, and had originally chosen to ignore her. However, Heaven had other plans, as G-d Himself said, "From which union shall kings arise if not from this one? From which other unions would nobles arise?" Therefore, G-d sent an angel to draw Yehudah to her. (Bereishis Rabbah 85:8)

What deception! Tamar, by pulling the veil over her face was able to pull the wool over Yehudah's eyes, big time. This, of course, was payment for having pulled the wool over his own father's eyes earlier in the parshah, when Yehudah presented Yosef's cloak with the blood of a kid goat on it claiming it to be the blood of Yosef himself.

However, the essential deception was not of Yehudah, but of someone, or rather, something else, as the Arizal explains:

This is also the reason for the episodes of Tamar, Rus, Rachav the prostitute, all the souls of converts, all the kings from Dovid, and Moshiach who will have come from Rus the Moabite and the union of Yehudah and Tamar. Rebi Akiva himself was the son of converts who descended from

Sisera. This is the trickery and scheming that The Holy One, Blessed is He, uses against the K'lipos in order to free a soul exploited amongst them. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 38)

Ahah! What's a k'lipah, and why does G-d play games with them, even tricking them into . . . what?

The answer, of course, is quite Kabbalistic. However, more importantly, it represents the true undercurrent of world history, the ultimate conspiracy plot. For, similar to the case of Yehudah, events have occurred, and continue to occur in such a way as to seem either innocent or strange, but never as they really are, - that is, as important stages in the development of Moshiach and the Final Redemption.

As the Midrash says:

The tribes were involved in Yosef's sale. Yosef was immersed in mournful thought about his separation from his father. Reuven was involved in repentance for his sin. Ya'akov was mourning for Yosef. Yehudah was getting married. And while all of these events were taking place, G-d was preparing the light of Moshiach! (Bereishis 85:2)

That just about sums up the story of Yosef and his brothers, and for that matter, all of Jewish history.

SHABBOS DAY:

And God saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good. (Bereishis 1:31)

Not just "good" like everything else in creation, but VERY good, and the Midrash explains why:

BEHOLD IT WAS VERY GOOD: "It was good" refers to man, and "very good" refers to the yetzer hara, to teach us that if it wasn't for the yetzer hara, a person would not build a house, marry, or have children. (Koheles Rabbah, 3:16)

Thus, it is the role of the yetzer hara to keep us from becoming too righteous, to the point of divorcing ourselves entirely from physical creation. However, too much of any good thing can be destructive, and this is especially so when it comes to the yetzer hara:

Rebi Shimon ben Levi said: A person's yetzer overcomes him daily and seeks to kill him, as it says, "The wicked one watches for the righteous and seeks to kill him" (Tehillim 37:32), and if The Holy One, Blessed is He, did not help him, he could not prevail, as it says, "But G-d will not forsake him to his power" (Ibid.). (Kiddushin 30b)

So, which is it, friend or foe? The following helps to clarify the matter somewhat:

As we have already explained, every soul in the world is enclothed in a k'lipah - the zuhama of the snake. That k'lipah is the sod of the yetzer hara with which a man is born, as a result of Adam HaRishon's sin, such that the yetzer hara became rooted in him; they have become mixed together like a dough. This is the sod of why the yetzer hara has such ability to cause a person to sin: he is a

complete "master of the house" in the body of a man. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 23)

Thus, before Adam's sin, the yetzer hara was "very good," providing the perfect balance within man that allowed for free-will choice. Before the sin, it was external to man himself, appearing at the time in the form of the Original Snake, allowing for man to make a clear distinction between his own voice and that of the Sitra Achra - the Opposing Angel.

However, as a result of the sin, man became less spiritual and more physical, and the yetzer hara became a part of his new physical being. This made it far less likely for him to distinguish between his own voice to do good, and the voice of his internalized yetzer hara to do bad.

How did this happen? It happened because:

As a result of the sin of Adam HaRishon, all the souls fell into the Depths of the K'lipos. The K'lipos themselves are the remainder of the zuhama and "p'soles" separated out from that which was holy at the time the "kings" of Edom died, as we have explained. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 15)

Thus, the K'lipos represent a "bad spiritual neighborhood," if you will, whose entire energy is against all that G-d deems valuable. It is like a spiritual tractor beam that pulls a person in its direction, creating the need to fight hard to become free of its grip. It is from here that souls are taken before entering a body and coming into the world, which results in a person's inclination to do evil.

One's departure does not end at birth. Rather, the influence of the K'lipos is ongoing, and the main struggle a person has throughout the course of his life is to completely break free of their influence. Any place that is spiritually impure is considered part of their territory, and to be there is to be amongst the K'lipos and increase one's spiritual challenge. Anything that is considered to be spiritually lacking, is considered to be part of their property, and to partake of it, is to ingest part of their world.

However, the life of the K'lipos is not forever, but limited. In fact, as the Talmud teaches, Moshiach's arrival signals the end of the K'lipos (Succah 52a), which is why, we will see, Yehudah's taking of Tamar had to appear as "unholy" as it was.

SEUDOS SHILSHIS:

And it came to pass at the time she gave birth that behold! There were twins in her womb. (Bereishis 38:27)

Too late - for the K'lipos, that is! As they looked on, so-to-speak, they must have shaken their heads and said, "How did that happen? How did such a holy child, the ancestor of Dovid HaMelech get born from such a seemingly unholy union? How did we miss that one? The last time we were so duped was when Moav, the ancestor of Rus, resulted from Lot and his own daughter!"

Seeing anything but holiness, the K'lipos relax their grip on the souls that they know can do them the

greatest damage by furthering the cause of redemption. For, if the arrival of Moshiach and the Final Redemption spell the end of the yetzer hara and all the K'lipos, then they can be expected to fight against anything and everything that contributes to this cause, such as the ingathering of the exiles back to Eretz Yisroel.

Avraham was fathered by the VERY unholy Terach, Rivkah came from the deceitful Lavan, and Dovid HaMelech's birth and ancestry had so many question marks surrounding them, that even his own people ridiculed him and questioned his right to the monarchy! They obviously fell for the trick as well, which is a common problem throughout Jewish history.

As G-d plays by the rules of the creation He made, using trickery to outsmart the K'lipos, He often ends up outsmarting many of us as well. When we judge situations only by how they appear on the surface, we are in danger of misjudging people, events, and things, condemning them rather than appreciating their role within Jewish history.

When we drown in the world of pshat, that is, we only view things on a superficial level, we can end up destroying that which is intrinsically valuable, and saving that which ought to be destroyed. Very little is often what it seems to be on the surface in Jewish history, a major lesson of the Chumash, and the underlying teaching of the Talmud.

This, ultimately, is the main theme of the story of Yosef and his brothers. Yosef appeared to his brothers like a silly, self-centered child who had the potential to cause great damage to the Jewish people. From their vantage point, they could not see how Heaven could possibly have destined him to be the savior of their entire family, and Jewish history, for that matter.

So shocked were they when they found out just how wrong they had been, that they had fallen back without the ability to even excuse their past mistake. Redemption had been coming and had arrived, and they had not been ready for it, because of their superficial evaluation of Yosef and his dreams. While they saw that Yosef had been malevolent in nature, Heaven was calling him "Tzaddik."

It is precisely the discrepancy between these two points of view that the holiday of Chanukah comes to eliminate.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Kislev & Chanukah, Part 3

As I prepared to take my seat on my recent flight from Los Angeles to New York, I glanced at the gentleman already seated next to me. He certainly was not a religious man. However, I could not even tell if he was Jewish, and judging from his appearance and lack of interest in me, I assumed that he wasn't.

As I put my small Talmud onto my seat for a second, as I placed my hat and jacket in the overhead bin, I saw him take a quick glance at it, and imagined him saying to himself, "Ah, Hebrew. He's one of

those religious Jews. Nothing for us to talk about." I thought the same thing to myself.

However, within seconds he had initiated a conversation that quickly turned to some reform rabbi who was trying to use aerial photographs to disprove the exodus story from the Torah. He wanted to know what I thought about the idea, and what I would do if the exodus account proved to be fabricated.

I still didn't know if he was Jewish or not, friendly or hostile.

I was exhausted, and wanted and NEEDED to sleep to be ready for taping a new video the next day. I took a big breath, sighed, and answered back what I knew would lead to a lengthy discussion, which it did. However, not before I found out that he was Jewish, and in fact studying a little Torah with someone with whom I was already familiar.

It was another one of those lessons, a true Chanukah lesson. I, of all people, who teach this message all over the place, and at all times had fallen for the olive and missed the oil.

Is it a coincidence that "hashemen" (the oil), "neshamah" (soul), "shemonah" (eight), and "mishnah" (oral teachings), all share the same letters? They all represent something that exists on the inside, something that is not readily available without some kind of process to extract it and reveal it on the outside; something that can be missed if one is only concerned with externalities, as the Greeks were.

If you believe that history is random, as they did, and accept the concept of fate and tragedy, where bad things happen to good people just because that is the way the world is, then there really exists little reason to investigate below the surface for deeper meanings.

However, if you believe as the Torah teaches us to, that history is far from being random, but orchestrated by a benevolent Heavenly Father with a master plan in mind, and a desire to benefit His children in the best way possible, then all the reasons in the world exists to look below the surface of people, places, and events for their deeper meaning. It is below the surface that answers to life can be found, and understanding of the master plan can better be perceived.

More than that, it is on that level that the miracles occur. For, just as in the world of physics, as we delve deeply into the nature of matter, and discover that things act very differently on this level as one would expect from looking at the surface of things, so too in the world of spiritual reality, nature is just a camouflage for a more supernatural reality.

We stumbled upon this message in the thirty-sixth century from creation, when Mattisyahu and his loyal followers threw themselves into the hands of G-d, and challenged the fate that had seemed to pursue them. However, having recorded the results for posterity, Chanukah is a yearly invitation to re-enter that mindset, and to take advantage of its power.

It only remains for us to accept that invitation, and show up.

A great and freilechen Chanukah and Shabbos,
Pinchas Winston

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