

GOING DOWN?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

G-d told Moshe, "Speak to Aharon, and tell him that when he lights up the menorah, the seven lamps should illuminate towards the Menorah." (Bamidbar 8:1-2)

Today, thank G-d, for the most part, Christians and Jews do their own thing in their own places in a peaceful manner.. Many gentile groups still actively try to convert Jews, holding onto their age-old belief that until a Jew converts, his soul is doomed and the final salvation of mankind cannot happen until the Jewish people are no more, but their efforts are far more subtle (and perhaps more dangerous). There was a time, not too long ago, when the only option to conversion for a Jew was a brutal physical death.

This led to the famous debates of the Dark Age, in which Jewish scholars were forced to appear before Christian scholars, and often the local ruler, to defend Torah and traditional interpretations. The survival of an entire Jewish community often came down to who bested whom in these debates, and winning the debate for the Jews did not always mean winning the struggle, and any relief gained by the Jews was often short-lived.

In Ptolemy's time the Torah was translated into Greek, called the Septuagint (Megillah 9a), in order to know what the Jews were learning more than to convert them. The only "religion" the Greeks espoused was Hellenism, and there was no need to debate Torah scholars to prove its worthiness from the Greek perspective. The Hellenistic perspective did not even pretend to come as an "improvement" to Judaism, whose concept of G-d was far different than that of the Greek world.

However, not so with Christianity. The very existence of the Jewish people was perceived as a contradiction to Christianity because both claimed to be G-d's Chosen People, and only one could fit the bill. As long as the Jewish people retained any of its chosenness, Christianity felt insecure and needed to put the Jews "in their rightful place." Hence the public debates that were designed to cause the humiliation of Jews and Torah.

But Tanach - Torah, Prophets, and Writings, is vast. Debates could last for hours, even days because of the constant referral to references which required looking up. To simplify this procedure, the possukim of Tanach was numbered, and chapters were created to make quick and easy referral

possible. It was certainly a logical system that many have retained since that time, and often use them as if they were always part of our tradition.

However, if you look into a Sefer Torah, - the form in which Moshe received and passed on Torah, you won't find the same chapter and verse numbers as you do in all Chumashim. You will find breaks, and they are called pesuchos and stumos - openings and closings, divinely established breaks in the text. According to the Ba'al HaTurim, these breaks were given to Moshe as opportunities to contemplate and digest what he had just been taught by G-d. According to Halacha, a valid pesuchah or stumah must have a space of at least nine letters.

The pesuchos and stumos were obviously not random, but logical breaks between matters and issues raised and discussed in the Torah. Therefore, they were recognized as logical breaks in the text, and the gentiles who numbered the verses and chapters, for the most part, followed the lead of the Torah.

Nevertheless, because of their source and the reason for the numbering, many Jews until this very day refuse to use them, as if doing so is to acknowledge the people who not only defamed Torah, but murdered countless Jews in the process. Some even feel that there is some kind of spiritual impurity involved with them, and considering that the translation of Torah into Greek was considered to be a very dark day in Jewish history, we can certainly find a historical precedent for such an opinion.

But, nothing happens by chance (Chullin 7b), G-d has many messengers (Rashi, Shemos 16:32), and all that He does is for the good (Brochos 60b). There are many factors that affect our decision-making process, some of which we are aware and can perhaps affect, most of which we are unaware and have no control over. But, NO MATTER WHAT, whatever a person, nation, or the world does, it will always be according to G-d's master plan, and it will ALWAYS contribute to the fulfillment of His mandate for Creation in some way or form.

And, as we have said all along, if something is wondrous in our eyes, then it is direct Divine Providence (Tehillim 118:23), that is, a message from G-d we are meant to see. Therefore, it can be considered more than just interesting that this week's parshah is both the EIGHTH of Sefer Bamidbar and the THIRTY-SIXTH in the entire Torah, especially in light of the Ramban's response to Rashi on the opening lines:

When Aharon saw the dedication of the princes, he became distraught because he was not included with them, neither he or his tribe. The Holy One, Blessed is He said, "By your life! Yours will be greater than theirs since you will light and prepare the Menorah" (Rashi, Bamidbar 8:2)

The Ramban refutes this explanation for the Menorah at the beginning of this week's parshah, and concludes with the following words:

The parshah is alluding to the dedication of the lights at the time of the Second Temple, which came through Aharon and his sons, who were the Chashmonaim and their sons.

In other words, out of nowhere, this parshah begins with an allusion to a future EIGHT-day holiday that is celebrated by lighting THIRTY-SIX candles, in a book that has a total of THIRTY-SIX chapters.

What a coincidence!

SHABBOS DAY:

In the beginning, G-d made . . . (Bereishis 1:1)

Question: How many worlds are there today?

Answer: Do you mean physically or spiritually?

Is there any better way to answer a question than with another question, especially when the real answer is from the realm of Sod? The story goes something like this:

In the beginning, there was only G-d, what Kabbalah calls the Light of Ain Sof (Without End). It is not the essence of G-d, G-d forbid, something about which we never think. But this light was everywhere anything could be, and it is infinite and beyond comprehension.

Then G-d decided to make man, which meant making Creation, which meant making a place in which Creation could exist, which meant withdrawing His light at the "center," leaving behind what is called the "Challal," a spherical hollow. It was inside this hollow that G-d, step-by-Divine-step, put every detail into its designated place that eventually resulted in the world in which we live. As big as the physical universe seems to us, it is a faint dot within the massive Challal, though it was for this dot of humanly existence that all of it occurred.

However, nothing is really created from the absence of G-d's light, and therefore G-d willed that some of the Light of Ain Sof should be allowed back into the Challal. It didn't just shine across the entire vast Challal, like a beam of a flashlight in a dark room on the distant wall. Rather, it came into the Challal in stages, creating a new level of existence before descending further into and toward the center of the Challal. It is this process, explain the Kabbalists, that gave rise to the concept of measure and boundary, up and down, the most basic elements necessary for spiritual growth.

We have just summarized hundreds of pages of some of the most important pages in some of the most important works of Kabbalah. And, if the Arizal revealed only two handbreaths and left some 2000 hidden, then you can imagine how much is actually missing from this explanation! Nevertheless, it will serve the purpose of bringing us to the point that answers the above question and the connection to this week's parshah and history.

When it was all said and done, the light had successfully created five levels, often referred to as "worlds," in the process of making a home and an environment in which man could survive and perfect himself (something that can only be enjoyed in the World-to-Come). This, of course meant that Creation had to support free-will, which meant that Creation had to allow for evil. But how can a light as holy and as perfect as that of the Light of Ain Sof create something as unholy and imperfect as evil?

The answer is, hold the light back a little. If there are five levels (called: Adam Kadmon, Atzilus, Beriyah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah), and each has ten levels of its own, then there are FIFTY levels altogether from the top of the Sefiros - the edge of the Challal - to the bottom. If the Light of G-d is allowed to descend all the way to the bottom, then there is no place for evil to exist.

Therefore, as the light traveled downward away from its Source, G-d stopped it at a certain point from the bottom, to allow a place for evil (and therefore free-will) to exist. How many levels from the bottom did the Light stop? According to Kabbalah, FOURTEEN levels (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 188), the gematria of the Dalet-Yud, which spells the Hebrew word that means "enough."

According to Rashi, this is alluded to in the actual Name of G-d that was used to make Creation: Shadda-I, spelled Shin-DALET-YUD. When G-d told the light, "Enough!" He was not only telling it to stop descending, but He was also telling it where to stop: fourteen levels from the bottom. How many levels did the light enter? THIRTY-SIX altogether, and considering that the B'nei Yissachar says that one of the four places G-d hid the light with which He made Creation is in the Chanukah lights. We can assume that a very deep and sublime connection exists between the two.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

"Because the hand is upon the Throne of G-d . . ." (Shemos 17:16)

Thus, when G-d took a vow to eliminate Amalek, who draws his life force from these fourteen levels, He said, "Because the hand (Yud-Dalet) is upon the Throne of G-d . . ." (Shemos 17:16). Yud-Dalet obviously has the same gematria as Dalet-Yud -(fourteen), making this a reference to the fourteen levels. G-d was saying: As long as those fourteen levels are allowed to remain void of My light, Amalek will live and thrive, and wreak havoc upon mankind, and particularly with the Jewish people.

Thus, Yehoshua bin Nun, literally, son of FIFTY, required FOURTEEN years to conquer and then divide up the Land of Israel among the Tribes. According to the Pri Tzaddik, Eretz Yisroel is said to be on the level of the Fifty Gates of Understanding. In the one battle they lost, the "Battle of Ai," the conquering Jewish army lost THIRTY-SIX men (Yehoshua 7:5). And in Sefer Bamidbar, which is THE book that prepares the Jewish people for life in Eretz Yisroel, just HAPPENS to have THIRTY-SIX chapters.

Thus, rectification of Creation is synonymous with the destruction of Amalek, which is the result of drawing the "Light of THIRTY-SIX" all the way down to the bottom of Creation, resulting in Yemos HaMoshiach.

If so, then we can understand an interesting halachah, one that is unique to Chanukah itself. Normally we do mitzvos in a way that accords them the greatest honor, as the posuk says, "This is my G-d and I will glorify Him!" (Shemos 15:2). Why then is it ideal to place one's Menorah between three and ten tefachim from the ground, which is almost on the ground itself, and seemingly not very honorable?

Unless, of course we are talking about drawing the Light of Thirty-six down to the very bottom of Creation, the final fourteen un-illuminated levels, and eliminating evil completely. And, as we know from Shabbos halachah, three tefachim is the level above ground that is considered as if being on the actual ground itself. That's all history is about. That is all history has EVER been about, and it is really the meaning of being a "light unto the nations." We are meant to be a vehicle to draw the light down to the bottom of Creation.

Having said this, perhaps we can see the sod as to why this parshah follows the previous one, which is what caught the attention of both Rashi and the Ramban. Rashi saw in it the consolation for Aharon HaKohen who was remiss about not being included in the offerings of the princes; the mitzvah of Menorah which is unique to kohanim was his compensation. The Ramban saw beyond that mitzvah to the time of Chanukah, when it would be his family, the Chashmonaim, who would re-kindle the Menorah after the Greeks put it out.

Building upon an insight from the Arizal and a deeper understanding of the previous parshah about the gifts of the princes, we can see how both Rashi and the Ramban were right on the money, ah, I mean, Chanukah gelt.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Nachshon, the son of Aminadav of the tribe of Yehudah offered on the first day. He offered one silver dish, 130 shekels in weight . . . (Bamidbar 7:12-13)

As the Arizal points out (Sha'ar HaPossukim, Shemos), the number 130 plays a major part in the gifts of the princes in the previous parshah because they are connected to the 130 years Adam HaRishon did teshuvah for the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Eiruvin 18b). Why 130 years? Because his sin blemished five Names of G-d (all sins do on some level), each name equaling 26; 5 times 26 equals 130.

It's a long story, and one which we have discussed in the past. But the gist of it is that Adam's 130 years led to the creation of the souls of the Erev Rav -(Mixed Multitude), who caused the golden calf, which made necessary the Mishkan, and the gifts of the princes for it in last week's parshah. And, what made Adam's sin possible was the fourteen levels the light did not descend at the beginning of Creation.

Thus, the Mishkan and the princely gifts were all part of the tikun, part of the process of drawing the Light of 36 to the final fourteen Amalekian levels. And thus, Aharon KaKohen was disturbed by the fact that neither he nor his tribe was involved in such an important tikun, especially since he was involved with the golden calf, albeit for the sake of Heaven.

However, as Rashi explains, the Menorah was his consolation. It was G-d saying to Aharon HaKohen, "You want to be involved in the tikun? By your life! Your tribe is responsible for the vehicle to draw down the Light of 36 in creation. -Hence, it is the 36th parshah from Creation, and they will be the one's to cause it to come to every Jewish home after the miracle of the Chashmonaim; hence, it is the eighth parshah in Bamidbar.

This, Rabbi Shimshon Pincus, zt"l, explained, is our specific task at this late stage of history. One need only read the headlines and check out the entertainment industry to see how rock-bottom society has reached. Yet, at the same time there are people doing teshuvah, learning Torah, making Shabbos, etc., in spite of all the "shmutz" around them, and with the evil that is lurking about.

Rav Pincus referred to this as Shiras HaMoshiach -(Song of the Moshiach). And, he says something even more remarkable: this song and praise of G-d counts much more to G-d than any of the songs sang by Jews in the past. For, so close to the end of history we are also in the basement of history, where it is quite dark, spiritually-speaking. Light a spiritual match down here, and you can't imagine how much good the light can do!

To adapt a phrase from Neil Armstrong the astronaut, every spiritual step taken at this stage of history may be one small step for the person, but one giant leap for mankind. And, in spite of the spiritual void we find ourselves in, G-d is always with us, right down here in the muck of history.

Perhaps this is the underlying message of chapter and verse numbers that were chosen by those

who were against Torah, but which, in the end, support the very lessons Torah came to teach.

Have a great Shabbos,
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