

SPEAR-HEADING REDEMPTION

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

For him and his seed after him will be the eternal priestly covenant for having been jealous for his G-d and for atoning for the Children of Israel. (Bamidbar 25:13)

Every society probably has its own definition of a wise man, and even Judaism has more than one. However, a famous one is: one who foresees what will transpire (Tamid 32a), which in truth sounds more like the definition of a prophet. However, the Talmud specifically says, chacham (wise man).

Obviously then, it means someone who projects into the future, someone who looks beyond the immediate moment to appreciate the impact that the present can have on the future. With respect to weather it means knowing whether or not to take an umbrella with you as you leave the house even though it is still sunny. Regarding life, it means anticipating the direction of history to avoid mistakes, and perhaps even danger.

The beginning and ending of last week's parshah are similar:

Balak, the son of Tzipor SAW . . . (Bamidbar 22:2)

Pinchas, the son of Elazar, the son of Aharon HaKohen SAW . . . (Bamidbar 25:7)

In fact, it was reported about Bilaam as well:

And Bilaam SAW . . . (Bamidbar 24:1)

Just before he launched into his prophecy about the future of the Jewish people, had he been a chacham he might have been able to see while it was still safe to do so. Now, he was being forced this vision by G-d, and it was about to be the source of his personal demise.

One might argue that it is the difference between Jew and gentile. However, the spies proved otherwise when all twelve of them saw the same thing, but only two of them were not intimidated and encouraged by what they saw. And, Rus showed that the same split can occur among gentiles when she continued on with her mother-in-law while her sister, Orpah, turned around and headed back to Moav. As a result, it was the descendant of Rus, Dovid, who slayed Orpah's descendant, Goliath.

Of course, once G-d stepped in and pronounced judgment on the generation of the desert, there

was tremendous regret by the spies and all those who had supported them. However, by then it was too late. G-d had taken an oath not to allow those who accepted the report of the spies and cried about it, to enter His Holy Land, and so for the next 39 years every Tisha B'Av, each one perished in the desert until they all died off.

Indeed, each year the survivors dug their own graves and lay in them, waiting to see if they would still be alive the next day until the ninth of Av passed, to arise from them and live another year. Pretty scary and seemingly unnecessary, a kind of sadistic tease, except that Heaven is neither sadistic nor apt to tease. There was a lesson to be learned there, not for the people to die, but for a tikun for the survivors and ESPECIALLY for our generation.

In English, the expression is, "You made your bed, now sleep in it." But that is a mild form of the real truth: you die in the grave you personally dig.

What does that mean? It means you pay a price for not being a chacham, and I don't mean for not knowing all of Torah. I mean chacham according to the other definition, the one who sees what will transpire in the future based upon the present. "Let's wait and SEE" can be good advice sometimes, but not when it comes to the future of the Jewish people, and the ultimate TORAH goals of the Jewish nation. Then waiting to see what will happen may mean having to watch yourself miss the boat, and worse, suffer the terrible consequences of doing so.

The lives of Balak and Bilaam did not even pass the half-way mark; Pinchas lived forever.

SHABBOS DAY:

And G-d saw the light, that it was good . . . (Bereishis 1:4)

It is an unusual verse. Being able to see something implies not being able to see it as well. If it is impossible NOT to see something, then it is already a part of one's consciousness and very being and not a function of seeing but a function of being.

Ah, but this was a special light. This was a light that, according to the Talmud, provided a vision of everything:

With this light Adam HaRishon was able to see from one end of the world until the other end.
(Chagigah 12a)

Kabbalah explains that the Talmud does not merely mean that Adam could see Japan from New York. It means that Adam's vision incorporated the totality of Creation, a G-d's-eye view of existence. However, as the Talmud adds, this light was hidden on the first day of Creation for the righteous in the future, because like everything else in Creation, it would have been subject to abuse by the evil people throughout history.

It would have been nice to share such a vision, even for a moment. It would be a Messianic moment, just like it will be in Yemos HaMoshiach. A person with such a vision would instantaneously relate to

all of Creation, feeling its existence and understanding its purpose, from the clouds in the sky to the grain of sand on the sea shore.

However, the Leshem explains that in hiding the light for the righteous in the Time-to-Come does not mean for a reward in the World-to-Come, but as an advantage in this world. He explains that hiding the light made it inaccessible to anyone whose character traits were not consistent with the holiness of the light, and likewise, the amount of exposure to the Ohr HaGanuz (the Hidden Light) depends upon the level of the righteousness of the person.

This is the essential reason for the different perspectives of people. "Different strokes for different folks" really means different visions for people on different levels of access to the Ohr HaGanuz. And, what is crucial to know is that one's ability to grasp the Big Picture, G-d's view of Creation and HIS mandate for history, is dependent upon how much of the Big Picture one sees, and it is a matter of life and death.

This is what the posuk is alluding to. The light that G-d saw is really the way He looks at Creation; it is His perspective, which is why it is so good. Encoded in this light, so-to-speak, is the reason why He created everything and what it is meant to accomplish in Creation. This allows man to build appropriate relationships to it and to work with everything in consonance with the will of G-d, and not in any abusive manner.

Therefore, this light is the framework for Creation, the system into which all other aspects of Creation fit into it. If life is a tapestry, then this light is the material into which all the threads of daily life are woven to form a Divine picture of the purpose of existence. And, we have another name for this light: Tree of Life, and more recently, Torah. For, as Kabbalah explains, it is for the light of the Ohr HaGanuz that the letters of Torah act as a conduit, and the higher the level of Torah, the more sublime the Torah concept, and the more this is the case.

Interestingly enough, Tanna d'Bei Eliyahu explains that when G-d barred the way to the Aitz HaChaim (the Tree of Life), He did so with derech eretz. In other words, He did not shut down access to the Tree of Life altogether, but made access to it dependent upon one's derech eretz, which is more than simply good manners. Rather, derech eretz here has more to do with the nature of the heart of a person, which is what access to the Ohr HaGanuz was based upon.

Indeed, there are thirty-two words in advance of the word good used to describe the Original Light - the gematria of the word leiv (heart). Access to the light requires a good heart, and as was pointed out earlier, Lag B'Omer, the day on which Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai revealed the Zohar was the thirty-third day of the Omer, preceded by thirty-two days - leiv, and followed by seventeen days - the gematria of tov (good).

The whole point of learning Torah is to develop a leiv tov (a good heart), one that permits access to higher and increased levels of the Ohr HaGanuz and the Big Picture. But here a good heart means more than just a nice heart, it means one that can expand to allow a growing relationship with truth.

It means a heart that doesn't shut down when it hears something new, something that represents a change of life, a source of discomfort. The Tree of Life is eternal; the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is a spiritual limitation in itself.

In fact, the only claim to eternity that the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil has is when it merges with the Tree of Life and ceases to be the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which it will do in Yemos HaMoshiach and onward. This is why the yetzer hara and the Angel of Death must go at that time. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was the basis for the demise of the ten spies, and of Balak and Bilaam.

Unless we switch over we are doomed to be trapped in the blindness of the present, lacking any true perspective on what is about to transpire.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

G-d told Moshe, saying, "The daughters of Tzelofchad have spoken well. Give them a possession amongst their father's brothers; the inheritance of their father will go to them. (Bamidbar 7:6)

"Eretz Yisroel is but one mitzvah. The Jewish people have always been about learning Torah. That is the source of our survival. Why all the emphasis on Eretz Yisroel all of a sudden?" This is a common complaint and misunderstanding.

If living in Eretz Yisroel is one mitzvah, then wouldn't it be considered to be like worshipping idols to live outside of the land? Living in Eretz Yisroel is a source of eternity every time you walk six feet, a form of atonement for all accidental sins, a guarantee for entry into the World-to-Come, as the Talmud says, and receiving one's portion in the land would not be connected to receiving one's personal portion of the Oral Law, as written in Tikunei Zohar. And, one would grow in holiness to the level of Jerusalem while the rest of the world only grows to the level of Eretz Yisroel, as the Midrash says will be the case in Yemos HaMoshiach.

Rather, whereas the rest of the world is on the level of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Eretz Yisroel is on the level of the Tree of Life, the Ohr HaGanuz. That's why Eretz Yisroel, unlike any other land can vomit out its inhabitants, and is responsive to the spiritual level of the people living there. Like the Ohr HaGanuz, access is permissible only to those who are fitting to use it and to live there.

In fact, the only reason why the land is tolerating so much sin today is probably a function of G-d's complete mercy, and the fact that so many Jews do not sin maliciously, that is, to rebel against G-d outright. Ironically, whereas life in Eretz Yisroel has gotten bad press in the Torah world abroad, life in the Torah world has gotten bad press among the secular Jews who live in Eretz Yisroel.

In the weekly magazine Mishpachah, there is an editorial by Yonason Rosenblum about Leiv L'Achim, an outreach organization. He recalls how the director was once returning home from a conference his organization had put together to teach those in outreach how to address the

pressing issues such as apparent contradictions between Torah and science, that stand between secular Jews and belief in Torah. The conference had been a success, and the director was on his way home from B'nei Brak after it had ended when he received a phone call from Rav Aryeh Leib Steinman, shlita, one of the greatest rabbis of our generation. Rav Steinman wanted to speak to the director immediately, and in spite of the late hour, he turned his car around and headed back to B'nei Brak to speak to the Gadol.

Upon arriving, Rav Steinman questioned him about the contents of the seminar, and he proudly explained the advanced approach to kiruv that was presented that day. However, Rav Steinman was far less impressed, to say the least, and he told him, "That is not our way. Teach them Torah."

The director of Leiv L'Achim was floored. He said that it was a classic example of what the Torah mentions in Parashas Shoftim about listening to Torah leaders, "even if they tell you right is left, etc." How do you teach Torah to Jews who have no interest in learning, he thought to himself.

Being the good soldier that he is, the director arranged for teachers to go into Ramla, an extremely secular town that is also half Arab. They canvassed the Jews there, knocking on doors asking if they were interested in learning, and if yes, what would they like to learn. To their utter astonishment, many said yes and began coming out to learn. Today there are three chedarim, one Bais Ya'akov, a kollel, and over one hundred teachers that come out on a weekly basis to teach there. The town, in a few short years, has been completely transformed.

Rabbi Uri Zohar, who only decades ago was the Israeli Johnny Carson, spoke about how after fighting for years he finally became religious just to avoid the fires of Gihennom. One day, long after his transformation (but long before the shock of his change wore off in the world he had left behind), he happened to be in shul. A group of men had gathered to learn some Talmud, which did not interest him at the time. He only joined them to share the tea with nana (mint leaves) that they had brought to accompany the learning.

Yet, the moment the rabbi began to discuss the Talmud, the give-and-take of the section they were learning, Rabbi Zohar said he was immediately swept up in the discussion, and he felt as if a light had been switched on for him. Torah was doing its thing for one whose heart was obviously open to growth.

In the words of one outreach professional, kiruv is the art of making the environment such that the uninitiated Jew feels comfortable coming back a second time, and then a third time, and a fourth time, etc. If you can do that, then Torah will sell itself, and the person will naturally become swept up in its great wisdom and approach to life.

It also works that way with Eretz Yisroel. If you can give people a pleasant experience there, then Eretz Yisroel sells itself. That is why the Sitra Achra goes out of his way to make it unpleasant for tourists, and why the rabbis of the Mishnah era went out of their way to fix the potholes in the roads. After all, as the Talmud states:

Three good gifts were given to the Jewish people by G-d, and each is acquired through difficulty. They are Torah, Eretz Yisroel, and the World- to-Come. (Brochos 5a)

If living in Eretz Yisroel was but one mitzvah, would it be incorporated into this list, and would it be second AFTER Torah?

What do all three have in common? They are all on the level of the Aitz HaChaim _ the Tree of Life, the framework within that which makes all of life gain meaning and direction.

MELAVE MALKAH:

It is a Tree of Life for those who grasp it. (Mishlei 3:18)

Grasp it? What is that supposed to mean?

On my most recent speaking trip to Canada and the States, I presented the most comprehensive version of the End-of-Days material that I have been developing for years now, or more accurately, that which has been developing before me. A lot of Hashgochah Pratis has been involved in this presentation, far more than I have ever experienced on any other project or presentation.

Depending upon the audience and the timeframe, I had to adjust the material. But in essence it was the same sources each time and the same message. The presentation was anywhere between 1.5 to 4 hours, and few people ever left earlier and most did not yawn, no matter what the hour or the length. And, very often the people that felt the most impact were those who had a strong background in learning, because they appreciated the importance of the sources and the clear connection that existed between them.

And, more often than not they were astounded how such important sources could have escaped their attention until that moment.

This week, I was approached by someone about making a movie about anti- Semitism. He knows this material somewhat, and he suggested to the committee involved in the planning and production of the film that, rather than take the most common and "natural" approach to the presentation, they should approach it from a more Kabbalistic point of view to reveal how the events of today are not just about man's propensity to hate minorities.

The committee became nervous at such a thought, and one person even commented that, "If such sources exist, why don't I know about them?" _ a pretty bold question.

Obviously he thought that if such sources existed, then they would have caught the attention of many people by now, and he certainly would have heard of them. He assumed wrongly that if the sources are real, and more importantly, crucial, they would have already made it to the public domain, as so many other ideas already have.

In a sense, this is what the Jewish people thought when they came to kill Pinchas for having killed a

prince of the Jewish people. If Moshe himself didn't do the act, what right did Pinchas have to do it? And, many probably also thought that when the daughters of Tzelofchad approached Moshe Rabbeinu at the end of this week's parshah, they were wasting both Moshe's and their time. After all, what could a bunch of unlearned women teach that Moshe had not taught already?

But, as the Leshem explains, Torah is a like a time capsule, with different parts of it being revealed throughout the generations when G-d deems the appropriate time has come. As the Talmud itself reveals, G-d taught Moshe the entire Torah, even that which school children would later ask their teachers. However, he was only permitted to reveal that which was necessary only for the generation in his time. What he did not reveal would come into the world through different people based upon merit and timing.

Thus, even though the Midrash Ne'elam has been part of the Zohar ever since Rebi Shimon bar Yochai revealed it just after the Second Temple was destroyed, and it was taught to him by Rebi Akiva, an even more heavenly being, and it can be traced all the way back to Moshe Rabbeinu. Still, it is a chidush (a new Torah idea) for so many, that the period referred as Techiyas HaMeisim (Resurrection of the Dead) begins 210 to 214 years PRIOR to the year 6000.

It is also a chidush that the Vilna Gaon, whose legal decisions form the basis of our daily lives, teaches that all that happens in the Sixth Millennium is a direct result of all that happened on Day Six of Creation. And, many are unaware that the Talmud records the twelve hours of Day Six, and why it was necessary to do so. Yet, as a result of this information, and with the ideas of the Vilna Gaon and other great Kabbalistics, we can determine that, as of 1990 we entered the period of time that corresponds to when Adam HaRishon ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, making this period of history the time of tikun _ rectification for the original sin of mankind. Surely, this has an effect on the events of today, even determining how we should go about rectifying the situation.

Yet, the information is there, and has been there for a VERY long time, seemingly hidden, but only from the minds of men until the moment in history when G-d determines it is time to open our eyes and show us what was always there. As King Solomon wrote, "there is nothing new under the sun," but that doesn't mean that we are aware of everything at all times. New to us does not mean new to Creation, and the fact that we are presently unaware of something does not mean it does not exist. Assuming so is a very Tree-of-Knowledge-of-Good-and-Evil point of view.

And waking up and realizing this is a matter of life-and-death, is the difference between being a Pinchas or a Balak, and between solving crises versus being a part of them.

Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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