THE BEST KEPT SECRET

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

This week's PERCEPTIONS has been dedicated in the merit of Temimah Yael bas Sarah and Zechariah ben Temimah Yael. May their recovery be quick and complete, and may the merit of all their chesed and hospitality serve to protect them from any further illness.

FRIDAY NIGHT:

I implored G-d at that time, saying, "My L-rd, G-d, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand . . ." (Devarim 3:23)

This week is Shabbos Nachamu, the Shabbos of Consolation after Tisha B'Av. The truth is, today, as I write, it is Sunday, the 29th day of Tammuz, and tonight is Rosh Chodesh Av. This afternoon I will have to go home and put on clothing so that I can wear it during the Nine Days, to avoid wearing freshly laundered clothes as is the halachah for the Nine Days, except for Shabbos. I am writing about consolation as I go into the final stage of mourning for the loss of our Temples and our sense of mission in history. A little strange, is it not?

I am reminded of the words of the Pri Tzaddik, who points out that the ninth day of Av is the day on which Moshiach is supposed to be born, and hopefully has already been born some time ago. He reminds us that the Talmud says that the letter Tes, because it is first used to describe good is essentially associated with good, even though it represents the number nine which for us, until the time of Moshiach, represents a day of infamy, going all the way back in time even to the year before Creation, when the vessels (pre-Creation Sefiros) broke.

Yet, the good with which the letter Tes is associated is the Ohr HaGanuz, the holy and sublime light with which G-d made Creation, gave the Torah, and with which He will bring the Final Redemption. It is, therefore, the light of nechamah, of consolation, and hence its name, the Ohr HaGanuz (Hidden Light) for that is what it is on the ninth day of Av each year until Moshiach comes and becomes its very revelation.

Then, retroactively, like Yosef's brothers, we will see how ALL the destruction was really just construction all along the way. However, that does not reduce the suffering along the way, from Ya'akov Avinu who for 22 years lived with the tragedy of his favorite son's alleged death, to all the billions of Jews who have suffered since then throughout the ages until this very day. But that is an

issue of tikun, of personal and national rectification, and does not take away from the fact that from the midst of destruction comes the very basis of redemption.

For example, there is the following famous account from the Talmud:

It happened again that they (Rabban Gamliel, Rebi Elazar ben Azariah, Rebi Yehoshua, and Rebi Akiva) were going to Jerusalem. When they arrived at Har HaTzofim (Mt. Scopus), they tore their clothing (as a sign of mourning over the destruction of the Temple, which could be seen from there). When they reached the Temple Mount and saw a fox coming out from the place where the Holy of Holies had been, they began to cry; Rebi Akiva laughed.

They asked him, "Akiva, why do you laugh?"

He answered them, "Why do you cry?"

They said, "If the prophecy concerning the place which the posuk says, 'The stranger who approaches (the Holy of Holies) will be put to death' (Bamidbar 1:51), is now fulfilled that, 'For the mountain of Tzion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it' (Eichah 5:18), should we not cry?"

He said, "That is precisely why I laugh! It says, 'I will take faithful witness to record, Uriah HaKohen and Zechariah...' (Yeshayahu 8:2). Now, why is Uriah mentioned together with Zechariah? The former was from the time of the First Temple and the latter was from the time of the Second Temple! It is, therefore, to make the prophecy of Zechariah dependent upon the prophecy of Uriah. Uriah said, 'Because of you Tzion shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps' (Michah 3:12). Zechariah said, 'There shall still sit old men and old women in the streets of Jerusalem' (Michah 8:4). Now, until the prophecy of Uriah was fulfilled I was very concerned that the prophecy of Zechariah might not be fulfilled. However, now that I have seen the fulfillment of Uriah's prophecy, it is clear that the prophecy of Zechariah will come to be."

Having heard this, they told him, "Akiva, you have consoled us! Akiva, you have consoled us!" (Makkos 24b)

An amazing story, for a variety of reasons, one of which has EVERYTHING to do with us, with OUR generation specifically, as we shall now discuss.

SHABBOS DAY:

Rachel is crying over her children . . . (Yirmiyahu 31:15)

Last week I mentioned an idea from Rabbi Moshe Shapiro, a world-renowned Torah leader in Jerusalem. He is well known for many things, but he mostly known for his deep and penetrating insights into Torah and history, in general. Thus, every Thursday night during the regular zman, over a hundred men pack into a large room to hang onto every word and thought he is prepared to transmit.

A friend of mine who attends a different shiur of the rav's, mentioned to me that his main point this week was that the nechamah of Yerushalayim (the consolation of Jerusalem) can only come through Sod. And, he used the above-mentioned account from the Talmud to help make his point.

Many people know of Rebi Akiva as the great Ba'al Teshuvah, the simpleton who at the age of forty was brave enough to start from scratch and learn Torah. They know of his great wife, Rachel, who sacrificed invaluable time with her unlearned husband, not to mention her right to her father's wealthy estate, to allow Akiva ben Yosef to work hard to join the great Torah academy of his time, and how her sacrifice ultimately resulted in him becoming the teacher of 24,000 students. And, many may even be aware that the Mishnah, eventually recorded by the great Rebi Yehudah HaNassi usually follows the opinion of Rebi Akiva.

Rebi Akiva had become a giant among the giants.

What they may not know is that Rebi Akiva, at the same time, became one of the greatest Kabbalists of all time. Whatever Rebi Shimon bar Yochai revealed and recorded in the tradition called the Zohar, he learned from Rebi Akiva. It was Rebi Akiva who hid the keys of Kabbalas Ma'asios (practical Kabbalah), the level of Kabbalah that was behind all the great miracles mentioned matter-of-factly in the Talmud.

When Moshe Rabbeinu went on top of Har Sinai, and was given a prophetic glimpse of the future Akiva ben Yosef, he didn't simply say, "Wow, what a brilliant man. He'll certainly be a help to the Jewish people somewhere down the line." Rather, he responded with awe and said to G-d:

"You have one such as him, and you still want to give the Torah through me!?" (Menachos 29b)

In other words, when Moshe Rabbeinu saw Akiva ben Yosef, he saw Akiva Rabbeinu. And, he wasn't just speaking out of humility either; he seriously and objectively saw Rebi Akiva to be on a higher spiritual plane than himself, which at that moment may have been true. For, Moshe's vision was at the start of the forty days of receiving Torah, not at the end of the forty years of teaching it.

Thus, the Talmud tells us that of the four rabbis who entered Pardes (the deep and sublime realm of Sod), only Rebi Akiva entered in peace and came out in peace (Chagigah 14b). The others either died young, went crazy, or became a heretic. He was truly a king among kings.

Rabbi Shapiro explained that the Torah of Rebi Akiva was that of the future, from the realm of Sod. He viewed all of history through the eyes of Sod, and therefore was able to see beyond the present representation of reality. Thus, where his colleagues saw doom and gloom, Rebi Akiva saw the seeds of redemption, and the promise of a brilliant future for the Jewish people. And, when he shared that vision with his colleagues, they too saw it and were immediately consoled, because with the help of Sod, everything finally began to make sense - NOW.

Thus, the Moshe Rabbeinu revealed to Rebi Shimon Bar Yochai:

In the future, Israel will taste from the Tree of Life, the Book of the Zohar, and will depart from the exile with it in mercy; and through them will the words [of the verse] be fulfilled: "G-d alone will lead him, and there was no strange god with him" (Devarim 32:12). And the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil which deals with what is forbidden and permitted, impure and pure, will no longer [be the] dominant [course of study] in Israel. Rather, our sustenance will come only from the Tree of Life (i.e., the Zohar). (Zohar, Ra'aya Mehemna 3:124b)

And, lest one say that is only true of the time during and after Moshiach arrives, the Zohar expounds:

It is as we have learned: All souls that occupied themselves in this world in an attempt to know their Creator in the study of the Upper wisdom, i.e., the secrets of Torah, will elevate themselves to a higher level which is not [the domain of] the souls who remained ignorant of the Upper Wisdom, and it is they who will arise from the dead first. (Zohar 1:182a)

No wonder it says:

"Rachel is crying over her children" (Yirmiyahu 31:15), because they are not involving themselves in this wisdom and the End approaches rapidly . . . since the arrival of Moshiach depends upon repentance, and the study of the Zohar and the wisdom of Kabbalah, and her children are neglecting its study with the exception of "one in each city and two in every family." For, there is no place set aside for its study in each city as there is for the study of Talmud. Therefore, its study is neglected and her children are not luring and expediting the arrival of Moshiach. (Kol B'Ramah, Introduction)

Originally, Rachel cried for her children who were being led into exile after the destruction of the First Temple. Thank God, we survived that. However, now, thousands of years and three more exiles later, our mother cries for a different reason: because her children possess THE key to bring an end to exile altogether, and usher in Moshiach without any more suffering, and they are disregarding that power on a daily basis, enduring more exile, and more suffering instead. Which mother wouldn't cry over THAT!

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

Let me now cross and see the good Land that is on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain and the Lebanon. (Devarim 3:25)

This was Moshe Rabbeinu's final heart-wrenching plea to G-d to allow him to overcome the punishment pronounced against him when he hit the rock and lost the right to enter Eretz Yisroel.

What did Moshe Rabbeinu really want? What was he after? A place to retire, a place to settle down after being on the run for so many decades? Why would he need that? He was headed for the ultimate retirement village, Gan Aiden, so why would he settle for a physical paradise that had yet to achieve its potential? To complete his mission?

After spending so much time and energy on the Jewish people, leading them out of Egypt to Har Sinai, receiving the Torah on their behalf, enduring their sins and the punishments that followed, perhaps Moshe Rabbeinu only wanted to see his mission to its final stage of settling Eretz Yisroel? Could be, but more than likely he had better things to do where he was going.

So then what?

Let's begin with the following statement from the Talmud:

Nun Sha'arei Binah (Fifty Gates of Understanding) were created in the world, and all of them were given to Moshe EXCEPT FOR ONE. (Rosh Hashanah 21b; Nedarim 38a)

And the question is, why? The Talmud answers in the most remarkable way:

Where Ba'alei Teshuvah stand, even the completely righteous cannot stand there. (Brochos 34b)

And the Pri Tzaddik explains why:

The level of the Fifty Gates of Understanding is the level of knowledge given to the Ba'al Teshuvah. (Pri Tzaddik, Tu B'Av 6)

And Moshe, being quite perfect from birth, ironically, could never become a ba'al teshuvah (Pri Tzaddik, Aikev). Yet, Rebi Akiva was one of the most famous and dedicated ba'alei teshuvah in all of history, and perhaps this was one advantage of Yehoshua leading the Jewish people into Eretz Yisroel, as opposed to Moshe himself. For, Yehoshua was Yehoshua BIN NUN, which means Yehoshua the "son of fifty."

And, regarding Eretz Yisroel it says:

Ten measures of wisdom fell to the world, nine of which fell on Eretz Yisroel, and one on the rest of the world. (Kiddushin 49b)

The goal of inheriting a portion of Eretz Yisroel has been to help each Jew find his own portion within Torah Sh'b'al Peh. (Zohar Chadash 2:137b)

The essence of Torah Sh'b'al Peh (Oral Law) is within it. (Pri Tzaddik, Parashas Massey 4)

There is no wisdom like the wisdom of Eretz Yisroel. (Bereishis Rabbah 16)

All of this is by way of the holy light of the Holy One, Blessed is He, Who emanates His light and makes it dwell on the Western Wall, and from there it dwells on the Jewish people [and then it spreads out to the rest of the world] ... (Drushei Olam HaTohu 1:161a)

In Eretz Yisroel only a minor amount of Chavut HaKever is necessary. For someone born in Eretz Yisroel it is already separate (i.e., spiritually elevated). (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 23, p. 66)

In other words, Eretz Yisroel is the land of the Nun Sha'arei Binah, the land of Sod, and what Moshe

Rabbeinu experienced through death (he died on Har Nebo, which means nun-bo, or "fifty upon it"), he could have had it in life had he only crossed the Jordan river as he pleaded to do.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to the bitter in soul. (Mishlei 31:6)

Based upon this posuk, the Talmud draws the following conclusion:

Wine was only created in the world to comfort the mourners and to reward the evil. (Sanhedrin 70a)

What connection can there possibly be between these two extreme classes of people? If anything, mourners are victims of bad, whereas evil people are perpetrators of bad. It is usually the latter who give the former what to mourn over, G-d forbid!

On the Pshat-level, wine's inebriating affect helps to alleviate some of the pain the mourner feels, while it serves to provide artificial joy now for an evil person who will pay for his life later. It is the evil person's payoff in this world, so that he will have no merit later on to protect him from the punishing and purifying effects of Gehinnom.

On the Sod-level:

Anyone who becomes settled through wine has the knowledge of his Creator . . . has the knowledge of the Seventy Elders; wine was given with seventy letters [Rashi: the gematria of yai'in (wine) is 70], and the mystery [of Torah] was given with seventy letters [sod (mystery) also equals 70]. When wine goes in, secrets go out. (Eiruvin 65a)

Indeed, there is one thing that both a mourner and an evil person have in common, and that is a lack of intellectual clarity. The loss of a dear one, quite naturally, tends to yank a person out of the big picture of life and into the smaller, personal picture that can leave him or her completely disoriented within the society from which they came and must continue to function.

Very few people in history were ever born inherently evil, and certainly good people who sin do not really mean to rebel. Indeed, all evil can usually be traced back to some form of intellectual darkness, some black hole in the person's understanding of what counts most in life, and why. That is why Amalek, the gematria of which equals the Hebrew word for doubt, is Ayin-malak, which means the severance of the Ayin . . . of the eye . . . of the seventy . . . of the sod.

Thus, after the Jewish people's first victory against Amalek, Moshe instructed Yehoshua BIN NUN about all future battles against the nemesis of the Jewish people:

G-d told Moshe, "Write this as a remembrance in the Book and recite it in the ears (b'aznei) of Yehoshua, that I shall surely erase the memory of Amalek from under the heavens." (Shemos 17:14)

The gematria of 'b'aznei' is 'sod' (secret), because the war against Amalek in the beginning is through Sod (Kabbalah). As we explained already, the work of 'Kibbutz Golios' is the war against Amalek, the

way to neutralize the Sitra Achra in the gates of Jerusalem, and Yehoshua was designated as Moshiach Ben Yosef [at that time]. (Kol HaTor, Chapter 2, Part 1:148)

(Though this work may be controversial to many, though not to Rabbi Chaim Friedlander who apparently gave his approbation to the version I have within my possession. I can verify that this is consistent with other words of the Vilna Gaon, and certainly with respect to Kabbalah in general.)

This may be a little avant garde for many, but then again so has every change undergone in the Torah world as a result of a crisis. We have been, for the most part, reactionary, responding to the needs of the times that we did not dictate, and that we have been unable to control. A lot of the changes we make have not been the kind that we would have chosen had we been consulted [by Heaven] when making decisions about the direction of the history.

But, maybe we're more behind the times than we know:

Know that it was the decree of G-d's wisdom, may He be blessed, that the book of the Zohar would not be divulged and publicized until the generation of Rebi Shimon bar Yochai, and only through him, may he rest in peace. A decree was made in Heaven that after the generation of Rebi Shimon bar Yochai and his son Rebi Elazar, this wisdom should not be studied publicly until the final generation - that of Moshiach Ben Dovid. And this is what we find in the Tikunim in many places, that the secrets will not be revealed until the generation of the coming of Moshiach. Elsewhere it says that in the merit of Rebi Shimon bar Yochai's circle, Melech Moshiach will be revealed . . . (Ohr HaChamah, Introduction)

That's fine. There are many quotes regarding the Final Generation, those Jews who merit to be alive when after almost six millennia, Moshiach Ben Dovid finally arrives. The question is, though, who is that infamous Final Generation, and how do we know? So, Rav Avraham Azulai continued:

I have found written that what was decreed in Heaven, that the True Wisdom (i.e., the Zohar) should not be studied in public, was only for a specified period of time until 5250, and from that time on would be considered the Final Generation, at which time the decree would be annulled, and permission would be given to study the Zohar. From 5300 on, it is among the foremost deeds to study [Zohar] in public, old and young alike, as is mentioned in the Ra'aya Mehemna. And since it is due to this merit that Melech Moshiach will come and not to anything else, it is not befitting to be careless [in its study]. (Ibid.)

What can I tell you, but don't shoot me; I'm only the messenger. And know that consolation only comes through Sod, through the Tree of Life, from seeing the Big Picture with your mind's eye.

Have a great Shabbos, and be consoled.
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Text

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