

WALLS OF WATER

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Your right hand, G-d, is glorified with strength; Your right hand, G-d, smashes [the] enemy [tiratz oiye]. (Shemos 15:6)

The full extent of Pharaoh's miscalculation is realized in this week's parshah. He must have been in terrible shock as he watched his army enter the sea between two walls of water, just as the fleeing Jewish nation had done, only they did not make it out alive. He gambled and lost big time; his nation was wiped out by walls of water.

There had been many ways to kill the male children of Israel in Pharaoh's time. However, Pharaoh had chosen drowning because he believed in G-d. Indeed, not only did Pharaoh believe in G-d even before Moshe Rabbeinu had shown up on the scene in the Name of G-d, but he also knew about the well-known principle of middah-k'neged middah, that G-d punishes measure-for-measure (Sanhedrin 90a).

Therefore, if one wanted to kill Jewish children, G-d forbid, and get away with it, he would have to choose a form of death for which G-d cannot reciprocate. And since G-d had already made a covenant back in Noach's time that He would not destroy the world with a flood again, Pharaoh had calculated that this was a sure-bet way to execute his plan without being the subject of middah-k'neged-middah punishment.

And he was right - about the world-wide flood part. But, to drown a single nation with water, well, that was not part of the contract, as Pharaoh watched with horror as the best of HIS men were drowned by walls of water in the Red Sea.

Ironically, the tsunami off the coast of Indonesia occurred the same week as the parshah in which Rashi explains this. However, at first glance one might fail to see any connection between the walls of water in this week's parshah and the tidal wave for which the largest relief effort in history is currently underway. Except, that is, for the general rule that all punishment comes to the world because of the Jewish people (Yevamos 63a).

However, the following provides a deeper insight into the kind of Hashgochah Pratis that acts on behalf of the Jewish people some place far away from where most Jews are located, or going through difficulty. The Arizal says [my comments are in brackets]:

Your right hand, G-d, is glorified with strength; Your right hand, G-d, smashes [the] enemy [tiratz oiye]. (Shemos 15:6)

The letters [tiratz oiye] - Tav-Raish-Ayin-Tzaddi Aleph-Vav-Yud-Bais - are the same as Tzaddi-Raiof sh-Ayin-Yav Aleph-Yud-Vav-Bais (leprosy of Iyov), for since the right hand of G-d was glorified with strength to save the Jewish people, the Satan immediately began to accuse them. (Sha'ar HaPesikum, Beshallah)

[In other words, the Arizal is explaining, that even though the words tiratz oiye - smashes the enemy - is a clear allusion to the Egyptian enemy that had drowned in the sea, it is also an allusion to the suffering of Iyov, which, seemingly, has absolutely nothing to do with the Jewish people's salvation from the attack of Pharaoh's mighty army. Indeed, no one would even think to juxtapose both stories and yet, apparently, they are interdependent and this was embedded in the song of salvation itself.

For, according to the Midrash it was not clear-cut that the Jewish people were supposed to be saved at the sea. "Master of the Universe," the Accusing Angel argued at the sea while the fate of Israel hung in the balance, "were not the Jews idol worshippers in Egypt? Why do they deserve miracles?" (Yalkut Shimoni 1:234).

As the Talmud teaches, times of danger are also times of Heavenly accusations and Divine judgment, and that is why they can have fatal results, G-d forbid. Nevertheless, this notwithstanding, was a promise to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov to preserve some remnant of their descendants throughout the ages until the end of history. Four-fifths of those descendants had already died during the Plague of Darkness; the one-fifth by the shores of the Red Sea was all that remained with which to fulfill the agreement to the Avos.

Yet, as long as the Satan hovered above hurling accusations at the Jewish people before the Heavenly Tribunal, G-d, Who prefers to operate according to the rules that He created to run Creation, was caught in a standoff. What to do?

SHABBOS DAY:

G-d asked the Satan, "Did you set your heart to [take note of] My servant Iyov? For there is no one like him on earth; a wholesome and upright man, who fears G-d and shuns evil . . ." (Iyov 2:3)

Thus, the Arizal revealed, the dilemma facing G-d and the Jewish people was resolved in the following manner:

Therefore, He gave Iyov over to him (i.e., the Satan) to inflict him with leprosy (boils are a form of leprosy). (Sha'ar HaPesikum, Beshallah)

[In other words, G-d used Iyov as a draw for the Satan, to take the heat off the Jewish people. Apparently, the Satan cannot accuse in two places at the same time, so rather than just push the Satan off and ignore him, G-d changed his focus. With the Satan busy working another beat in a

distant district, G-d was free, so-to-speak, to perform the necessary miracle to save B'nei Yisroel and fulfill His promise to the Avos, without bending His rules of Creation too much. Thus, as the Talmud says, Iyov's suffering was really the result of the Jewish people . . . though not necessarily the way it appears, as the Arizal continues to explain.]

As the Zohar says, there were three advisors of Pharaoh, one of which was Iyov, and he advised him to control their bodies and money, but not to kill them. Therefore, G-d repaid him (Iyov) measure-for-measure, giving the Satan permission to destroy his wealth and inflict his body with boils, but not to kill him . . .

[Thus, Iyov had not been the hapless innocent bystander we might have taken him to be. There was method in the madness and a reason why G-d ignored the following: One should not open his mouth to the Satan (Kesuvos 8b). Iyov could have been the source of Jewish freedom back at the beginning of the oppression, but instead supported its infliction; middah- k'neged middah, he was the unwitting source of their redemption 116 years later, a fact, apparently, that was revealed to the joyous Jewish nation on the other side of the miracle.]

This is alluded to in the words *tiratz oiye*v . . . because when they crossed the sea, The Holy One, Blessed is He, gave Iyov over to the Satan, so that he should not accuse the Jewish people, and therefore it is hinted to in this Shirah. (Sha'ar HaPesukim, Shemos 15:6)

However, the story does not end there. It is a well-known and accepted concept amongst the Kabbalists that we reincarnate, and often many times. Rabbi Chaim Vital wrote, based upon the teachings of his master, the Arizal, an entire sefer on the concept called Sha'ar HaGilgulim - Gate of Reincarnation. Another similar work by another student of the Arizal is called Seder HaGilgulim - Order of Reincarnations.

Once you factor gilgulim into history, then all of a sudden many of the question marks in people's lives disappear. Tikun in a current lifetime can be for errors committed in previous lifetimes, while to the person and onlookers, there seems to be no discernible reason for the suffering or challenges. And thus, though the book opens on Iyov's life while he is righteous, the Arizal taught:

Terach, Avraham's father, reincarnated into and was rectified by Iyov. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 36)

In other words, Terach, an idol-builder and worshipper in Nimrod's time, though he had repented during his lifetime, still had died with some spiritual loose ends. Apparently, he still required some form of tikun to finish the job his son, Avraham, had prompted him to start during his lifetime, and that meant returning to this world once again, not as Terach but as the righteous Iyov.

Thus, it was the suffering of Terach's soul in the body of Iyov that completed the tikun for the father of Avraham. By using the moment of truth at the shores of the Red Sea to initiate Terach's final tikun was just another example of how Heaven often kills two birds with one stone, allowing different aspects of justice to be accomplished, often beyond our ability to see and comprehend. It may take

phenomenal coordination to make it work, but when you're G-d it is far from impossible to carry out. Personally, I don't know the Heavenly cheshbonos that led to such an international catastrophe, the effects of which we are only beginning to understand, but cheshbonos there had to be. And, whether we like it or not they involve the Jewish people, either those who were there or those who were elsewhere, and most likely both. And whether we know it or not, every last individual involved was not there by chance, but part of a master Heavenly scheme that oversees the rectification of every individual Soul- Spark.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

My strength and song is G-d, and He is my salvation. This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him; my father's G-d, and I will exalt Him. (Shemos 15:2)

These words too are from the Shir Shel Yumm - the Song of the Sea, that the Jewish people sung after ascending from the sea and witnessing the destruction of the pursuing Egyptian army. They are filled with all kinds of insights, such as the following:

THIS IS MY G-D: In His glory He revealed Himself and they pointed to Him with their finger exclaiming, "This is my G-d!" A maidservant saw at the Red Sea what even the prophets never saw. (Rashi)

In other words, the miracle at the sea was such a phenomenal level of Divine revelation that G-d seemed close enough to point at, so-to-speak. It was still short of the level of revelation coming up at Mt. Sinai at the giving of Torah, but it was also so intense that the Presence of G-d was indisputably everywhere.

Indeed, the words of the Shir Shel Yumm are filled with all kinds of insights and even allusions to the future, but in this case there is an allusion to the future that leads back to the Shir Shel Yumm:

Esther summoned Hasach, one of the King's chamberlains, whom he had appointed to attend to her, and ordered him to go to Mordechai, to find out what this - mah ZEH - was all about and why (al mah ZEH). (Esther 4:5)

In the story, Esther is already the queen. And Haman is already second-in- command, and has received the king's signet ring allowing him to carry out his evil plan of annihilation of the Jewish people. Upon learning the news, Mordechai put on sack cloth and ashes and placed himself at the gate of the palace. When Esther heard of Mordechai's appearance, she made her inquiry.

However, says the Talmud, what Esther was really asking Mordechai was:

Perhaps Yisroel has transgressed the Five Books of the Torah, as it says, "The Tablets were written on both sides (miZEH umiZEH hem)" (Shemos 32:15). (Megillah 15a)

In other words, Esther saw the unprecedented crisis facing her people and understood that it was a

Divine message; everything always is. She knew from Mordechai that Amalek grows only within the spiritual vacuum left by the absence of Torah-clarity, the absence of clarity on the level of:

Zeh E"li v'anveihu - This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him.

What concerned Esther most was that she perceived abandonment. Where was G-d? Why was this happening to her and her people? How did Haman, yesterday a virtual nobody rise so high on a political scale to the point that he controlled the king? How would it all end, for good or for bad, G-d forbid? Esther was only too aware of what Haman's rise to power meant, and she sensed that the vision of G-d once held by the Red Sea had once again weakened to the point that Amalek could grow in influence.

In the absence of light, darkness prevails.

But only for a time.

MELAVE MALKAH:

On that day, G-d will be One, and His Name will be One. (Zechariah 14:9)

There is a mitzvah of Yichud Hashem. In simple terms it means that, all we perceive in Creation can be traced back to G-d, ultimately, by every human being. Yemos HaMoshiach, the prophet informs us, will be like that - exactly.

In the meantime, it is not like that. At the end of Parashas Shemos, Moshe Rabbeinu came back to G-d and complained about how his demand for freedom of the Jewish people resulted in the worsening of slavery. G-d countered with a lesson about His Names, explaining how Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov only knew G-d on the level of E"l Shadd"ai, whereas Moshe was relating to G-d on the level of Hovayah - G-d's four-letter Ineffable Name.

There are many important ways of understanding what G-d was teaching Moshe Rabbeinu, one of which very much applies to our present situation. For, after having been expelled from our own land or lands of other peoples that we have lived in for thousands of years, we are witnessing the expulsion of Jews from Jewish lands and by Jewish hands.

And, with tactics that have often been attributed to our enemies in the past In order to achieve results that we all know are not attainable.

Forcing a nation whose unity was once its strongest asset in the face of international pressure to become divided, there are murmurings of milchemes achim - civil war.

We gave away the Sinai in the name of peace. We will give away parts of the West Bank for the sake of peace. They will ask for Jerusalem to make peace possible. And, all of it stands to divide our people and leave us vulnerable. It seems to be working in the opposite direction of redemption. Is this not called going backwards? We could echo the words of the great and loyal Moshe Rabbeinu:

"You call this geulah?"

"You know," G-d told Moshe, "when I discussed all of this with your Forefathers it was hundreds of years ago. I told them that their descendants would be strangers in a land that was not their own, and that the nation under whose authority they would live would oppress them. Did they question Me? No. And, when I told them that the fourth generation would go out from slavery and return to Eretz Canaan, did they ask Me how? No. They trusted Me. They had faith in Me. The program had barely begun in their time and yet they walked with Me as if it had already been completed and fulfilled. And you are actually living to see the end of it; I have sent you Myself to redeem My people, your people, and I even told you how and when the redemption will occur. And you question Me? You ask Me why the situation has temporarily worsened, as if I have lost control of it, as if Pharaoh's will can overcome My own? Where is YOUR faith?"

True, we are not Moshe Rabbeinu. And G-d does not talk to us directly or even indirectly through prophets - yet. We have not been sent, to our knowledge, to speak to the Pharaohs of our time to demand freedom for our people. On the other hand, the year is 5765. So much has happened in a short period of time, and if the Twin Towers and this tsunami have taught us anything at all, it is how fast lives and destinies can change in a split second from the direction we thought they were going.

There is no question that the situation looks grimmer each day. It also did in Egypt AFTER Moshe Rabbeinu, the redeemer, appeared on the scene. By the time Moshe came back, the people were kotzer ruach, at the depths of despair and exhaustion.

Yet, in 12 short months, those who had faith and saw the hand of G-d in all that had been happening were rocketed up to the level of Yad Ramah in this week's parshah by an exalted hand. It is easy to have faith regarding the events of the past. However, we earn reward in the World-to-Come for having faith regarding the events of the present and the future. And all of it is to create just the right scenario that can leave a Jew with a vision of G-d that inspires him or her to say,

"This is My G-d, and I will glorify Him."

Have a great Shabbos Shirah,
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Text

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