

GROUND-BREAKING NEWS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

G-d told Moshe and Aharon, "Separate yourselves from this gathering so that I may consume them in a moment." (Bamidbar 16:20-21)

Last Friday as I was winding my way from Rechavia towards the city center of Jerusalem my car was approached by an elderly lady handing out a blue-and-white ribbon. Handing out ribbons to passing cars is old hat these days, but the only ribbons I had seen until that time had been orange, the color that was chosen to express support for the people being thrown out of Gush Katif and surrounding areas.

The different color ribbon, the colors of the Israeli flag, and the fact that traffic was starting to move again, left my wife and I momentarily confused, so we rolled down the window to receive the ribbon. However, as my wife reached for the ribbon she heard the elderly and quite disarming lady say, "badi hitnakut" - material of disengagement - so she quickly pulled her arm back in ribbonless and traffic pulled us away from scene.

In other words, those in favor of "cleaning out" the Gush of Jews have decided to fight ribbon with ribbon. Until now, the only visual support attached to cars was the orange ribbon against hitnakut. Now, it seems, that the duel will be taken to the streets. For, until now if they did not have an orange ribbon tied to their car, it did not necessarily mean that they supported disengagement. Rather, it could have meant that either they had a ribbon and lost it, or they just did not want to make a public show of their support for the Jews being forcibly moved from their homes, schools, and places of business.

Instead, cars will be pulling up to the same light, and the one on the right will have an orange ribbon supporting the settlers, while the one on the left will have a blue-and-white ribbon (implying that disengaging Jews from a piece of Eretz Yisroel is more patriotic than letting them remain). As if driving Israeli roads and fighting traffic is not already tense enough!

Indeed, not ironic was the fact that this was taking place in one of the choice locations of the "Peace Now" activists, one block away from the Prime Minister's house. And, as I drove away it occurred to me that the entire thing might be government sponsored, another one of its schemes to convince the country that what is being slated for just after the three weeks of mourning for the Temple - the last one being destroyed because of wanton hatred and selfish motivations - is in fact good for the

future of the country, though it clearly will result in nothing more than a smaller, less secure country.

However, what really hit me as I drove away was the new level of visibility of the issue dividing the people of this land. I KNOW there are many people who support disengagement in this country, but I rarely come across them in my circles, and I don't read their newspapers. And, that G-d, I rarely have had occasion to debate them in the streets. But now they will be clearly defined, at least those of which are proud of their pro-hitnakut status.

The battle lines have been drawn for some time now. However, with each passing day they become sharper and more clearly defined as machlokes - argument - festers and grows forcing Jews to make a decision where they stand and why.

But, one of the most amazing things about arguments of this nature is how little many of the followers of both sides know about the underlying issues. Governments are secretive to begin with, rarely telling the people what is really behind their decisions for fear of public backlash, even if what is being done is truly for their own good. The Israeli government is even more secretive, and understandably so given the fact it is somewhat of a sheep living amongst hungry wolves.

Equally amazing is how a single argument can mean so many different things to different people. People can fight shoulder to shoulder for a single cause but for different reasons. For example, there are some who want to give away Azza to the Palestinians as a show of good faith, though arguably it is more a show of blind faith. There are some, even though they are Jewish with family who fought in past wars, who want to dislodge the settlers because they tend to see the Palestinians as being down-trodden and the Israelis as the aggressive warriors.

Then again, there are some who simply do not like religious settlers, and wouldn't mind throwing more out even from land that is not on the chopping block. Indeed, they don't like religion at all and they see the Orthodox and their idealistic, messianic attachment to the land as an impediment to Israel becoming just another European nation, or as an obstacle to pleasing the nations of the world, especially the United States.

But, unless you engage them all in private conversation you will not be able to tell to which category the 2,000 police VOLUNTEERS to expel the settlers belong. But, they are probably one of the main driving forces behind the recent decision to deny all access to the underground caves that, very likely, are the secret location of the Temple implements hidden thousands of years ago.

As we will see, it is essentially the difference between k'ish echad-b'leiv echad - like a single person with a single heart - and b'leiv echad-k'ish echad - with a single heart like a single person.

SHABBOS DAY:

When Pharaoh approached, the Children of Israel looked up and saw that the Egyptians chased them (Nun-Samech-Ayin), and became terrified. (Shemos 14:10)

The Egyptians chased: b'eiv echad k'ish echad - with a single heart, like a single person. (Rashi)

With respect to the Egyptians, the singular language of chased is used to indicate that each Egyptian pursued after the fleeing Jewish people for his own personal reason, producing a temporary appearance of unity. It just happened to be that the desire of each heart could, theoretically, be fulfilled through a common act.

However, we are told that at Mt. Sinai it was just the opposite with the Jewish people:

They traveled from Refidim and arrived in the Sinai desert. Israel camped there in the desert; they camped opposite the mountain. (Shemos 19:2)

They Camped: Like a single person with a single heart. (Rashi)

Meaning that it was not their hearts' desires that unified the Jewish people at Mt. Sinai, but it was unity for the sake of unity. This had the resultant effect of melting their hearts together into a single national heart, with everyone having the exact same desire to accept Torah and to serve G-d. The unity of the Jewish people at that moment in time was above and beyond any personal, selfish goal, the true measure of one's fear of G-d and commitment to truth.

This does not mean that with such an approach machlokes cannot occur. It does. However, the mishnah clarifies the fundamental difference:

Any dispute which is for the sake of Heaven will ultimately endure, and one which is not for the sake of Heaven will not ultimately endure. What is a dispute for the sake of Heaven? This is a debate between Hillel and Shammai. What is a dispute not for the sake of Heaven? This is the dispute of Korach and his assembly. (Pirkei Avos 5:20)

After all, humans will be humans and to be a human is to have an opinion. To be a Jewish human may mean to have a variety of opinions, sometimes more than there are people actually arguing. But that's okay, as long as the end goal is how to best serve G-d regardless of one's loss of personal material comfort. That's how Hillel and Shammai argued.

That's not how Korach argued, which is why Moshe is not mentioned as the other side in the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos. For, for all-intents-and-purposes, Korach could have been arguing with a wall, because that's how important Moshe's opinion in the matter was. If Korach had been pursuing truth, they accepting Moshe's opinion would have been just as easy as accepting his own once the argument was over. However, the only way to accept another opinion in his fight for personal glory was if the other side granted it to him, which could not happen in this case, and therefore his became a duel to the death.

However, this is the most important point to surface, that which the Mishnah is teaching us. Indeed, especially in situations where knowing all the issues of the machlokes is next to impossible unless you are a prophet, the only way to make a moral decision is by knowing the motives behind the

arguing sides. For, G-d knows that the average person cannot fathom the underlying truth about every issue in life, but He'll help us as if we do if that our heart's desire.

And, if we can't know the motives of the other against whom we are arguing or even working beside shoulder-to-shoulder, then we have to at least make an attempt to know our own motives. And, though you can fool some of the people some of the time you can't fool G-d any of the time, which means truly know your true motives, and only then can you actually make the best decision for taking up a side in a disagreement, confident that G-d will compensate you for what you cannot be expected to know and understand.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

Moshe said, "Through this you will know that it was G-d who sent me to do everything, and that I have not acted of my own accord. If these men die naturally, sharing the fate of most men, then G-d has not sent Me. However, if G-d creates a new thing, and the earth opens up her mouth and swallows them up with all their possessions, sending them to their graves alive, then you will know that these men have rebelled against G-d." (Bamidbar 16:28-20)

In case you have not figured out by now, I am not for disengagement. How can I be? I love every last square inch of Eretz Yisroel and cannot part with any of it. If I truly believed that doing so would increase the safety of my people, then I would have little other choice, especially if the Torah leaders supported doing so. However, though many have not spoke out against it, they haven't spoken in favor of it as well, while others clearly do not back it.

Personally, I can't help but see this entire episode as an exercise in birrur, to force Jews - ESPECIALLY those in the Diaspora - to decide where they stand with respect to Eretz Yisroel at this late stage of history and redemption. Especially when the Rashbam has said that the Akeidah occurred because Avraham wrongly gave Azza to the Philistines as part of his pact in Be'er Sheva. Uncannily, we are dealing with Palestinians which is sounds awfully close to the name of the people Avraham dealt with in his time, and over the same piece of real estate.

Furthermore, we are talking about the dismantling of Torah-based communities and the removal of yeshivos, both of which are devoted to planting and developing land that is included in the Biblical borders of Eretz Yisroel, both of which are committed to the fulfillment of the laws dependent upon the land. And, all of which was built up with tremendous self-sacrifice, THE currency for acquiring Eretz Yisroel.

According to the Vilna Gaon, this is one of the main battles against Amalek - and the Erev Rav - at the End-of-Days, who only controls the land while it remains desolate. According to the Kli Yakar, it was to fulfill such mitzvos that Moshe Rabbeinu pleaded with G-d to enter Eretz Yisroel (Devarim 3:23), and this is the reason why.

Personally, for the reasons mentioned above, in spite of all the effort being made to the contrary, I

do not believe that hitnakut will go through. On the other hand, I do not believe that it will be stopped through natural means either, since the people who would stop it are not in power to do so, and those in power to do so do not have the clarity or backbone to stand up to those forcing it upon the Israeli people.

Indeed, it would seem that the only way that it can be derailed is when Heaven steps in directly. Something is going to happen, probably unexpectedly, that will force the country to shift its attention and reserves in a different direction. It may come down to the wire, and look as if there is no hope, but the redemption of G-d often comes at the blinking of an eye, and probably will do so here as well.

We have given Heaven no choice. We are placed between a hard rock and a wall, and whether we did this to ourselves - as Korach did in this week's parshah - or Heaven arranged it - as in the days of Mattisyahu and the Chashmonaim - is immaterial at this point. It is, in the end, a situation that cannot occur, even temporarily, at this stage of history. Therefore it won't, no matter how much the other side, which for the most part does not believe in or care about Moshiach or redemption, tries to sell it to the rest of the people.

The ground will shake, either figuratively or literally, and it will open, either actually or metaphorically, and the true intention of G-d will be known to all, just in time for some, too late for others.

But in the mean time . . .

MELAVE MALKAH:

The earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up with their houses, and all the men who joined with Korach, as well as all of their possessions. All of them and their possessions went to the grave alive, and the earth covered them up. They disappeared from amongst the people. The entire nation surrounding then ran away as they heard their screams and said, "The earth will swallow us up!" (Bamidbar 16:32-34)

The Talmud teaches that, on Rosh Hashanah, three books are opened up: for the completely righteous, the completely evil, and those in-between. Both the completely righteous and the completely evil are judged immediately on Rosh Hashanah, whereas the beinonim have their judgment suspended during the Ten Days of Repentance until Yom Kippur, when it is finalized (Rosh Hashanah 16b).

This has been the story of the Jewish people throughout three millennia of history: two extreme points of view with a lot of confused people in-between trying to decide in which direction to gravitate. Not that the two extremes have always been right and left, good and evil, and I am not saying that this is the case across the board here either. I have no doubt there are a lot of well-intentioned supporters of disengagement as well. In some cases, the two extreme positions were taken upon by some of the greatest rabbis of the generation.

In Korach's day when G-d finally stepped in to end the show the two extremes were dealt with immediately. The completely righteous had nothing to fear, while the completely evil had everything to fear. However, the beinonim of that time, upon seeing the ground open up as predicted by Moshe Rabbeinu were forced to scatter in every conceivable direction to avoid being swallowed up by Divine retribution. It was a terrifying time.

Especially for the Ben Pelet family, about whom the Midrash says came close to losing its head member. When the crack in the earth began to spread, it did so right up to the bed he had been sleeping in to avoid finishing what he had started when he had joined Korach's rebellion. Had his wife not convinced him to avoid joining the final confrontation and devised a scheme for him to be drunk and asleep when Korach's men came for him, then he too would have gone down with the S.S. Korach. Instead, he narrowly survived, once again revealing how a single decision can make all the difference in the world when it comes to fulfilling Torah and the master plan for Creation.

These are turbulent times for the Jewish people, not to mention very confusing. We are fractured into many groups, each having its own perspective on the matters that count most to the Jewish people: G-d, Torah, the Jewish people, and Eretz Yisroel. There are signs of impending redemption everywhere and all the time, but seemingly to many there are also signs of just the opposite. And it is so hard to get a pronounced, clear, and unanimous Torah opinion about just about anything controversial today, though Heaven knows how badly we need it.

Fine. That is obviously the way G-d wants it at this time, painful as it may be. Which means that it is the greatest free-will opportunity of our time, a time which may be finishing faster than we know. World history began with a phenomenally huge and crucial choice; it is ending with one as well. And, how you make it will determine where you are when the ground - Eretz Yisroel - opens up and takes its due.

Have a great Shabbos,
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