

NOW WHAT?

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

See, I place before you today a blessing and a curse . . . (Devarim 11:26)

It seems like a no-brainer, right? Choose the blessing!

Well, so did not giving away Gush Katif to the Palestinians.

"But what was the alternative?" you may ask.

"You're right," I will answer and admit, "Sharon and his government were stuck between a hard rock and a wall. The hard rock being Hamas and their terrorist partners, and the wall being George Bush and the Western World countries."

The only question is, how did we get into that torturous position in the first place, without which we would never have even considered surrendering a single inch of Jewish soil?

It is Friday, August 18, 2005, as I sit down to begin writing this parshah sheet. This past Sunday was Tisha B'Av, followed by the final stages of Hitnatkut that have consumed all our emotions this week. I am always amazed at how old ideas take on a different understanding in a new context.

The Talmud informs us that Tisha B'Av was the result of the meaningless tears shed by the Jewish people the night after the Spies had presented their evil report about the Promised Land (Ta'anis 29a). Once again, 3,316 years later, we were rejecting a piece of Eretz Yisroel, and this time, abandoning a portion of our people who dared to live on it and make it bloom. The juxtaposition of the events is too obvious to ignore.

Several Israelis, when questioned about their feelings on the issue, selfishly and angrily said, "Good. I'm glad it's happening. They had it coming to them!"

They did? Why?

Just years ago they were the heroes willing to represent the Israeli people on an area of land that others wouldn't dare live on. Sharon even called them "heroes" in his speech. After all, he was completely behind the settlement when he saw the Jewish world in a different light at that time. It

never ceases to amaze me how cold secular Israelis can be to the plight of their own brothers, especially on ideological grounds.

In the past, I have told myself, "What do you expect from people who have fought in so many wars, and lived with so much death? What do you expect from people who have lived under the gun for so long, and who have born the wrath of the world for so many generations?" And, of course there was, "Had it not been for Israeli chutzpah, could they have drained the swamps and built this land against all the odds - and so quickly?"

Debatable, especially since G-d can do whatever He wants to. However, such statements worked to help me see and accept secular Israelis in a positive light, in spite of their efforts to cast a dark shadow from a traditional point of view.

Then there are my co-religionists. There are some who ripped their clothing in mourning at the loss of Gush Katif, while so many went about their business as if nothing was out of the ordinary. In some cases, bringing up the issue of Hitnatkut brought responses of anger, as if something heretical was being discussed. Some went out of their way, for political reasons, not to identify with the people of Gush Katif in any way. I also heard, "They had it coming to them" from some circles, albeit for different reasons.

One of the things that struck me on Tisha B'Av this year was Yirmiyahu's response to the exiled Jews of his time. If anyone had the right to wag his finger and scream at the top of his lungs, "I TOLD YOU SO!", it was the prophet Yirmiyahu.

For how many years did Yirmiyahu prophesize in the Name of G-d, only to derided, spat upon, abused, and even thrown into jail? In fact, it was while he was in jail that Yirmiyahu received the word of G-d to write what later became the first, second, and fourth chapter of Eichah. In jail! Wait, doesn't G-d run the world? Couldn't He have smashed Yirmiyahu's enemies, including King Yehoiakim, who burned the first version of Eichah, and free Yirmiyahu, at least long enough to write Eichah?

Yet, when Yirmiyahu's vindication finally came, he did nothing of the sort. Instead, amidst his wailing for his people he chased after them as they were being led to Babylonian in chains. He found their blood along the road and cried, their limbs on the way, and cried even more. All of it tore him apart. And when he finally caught up with the ones who were still alive, he embraced them, cried with them, and acted towards them as if they had been his closest friends all along.

Personally, I cannot fathom the depths of his Ahavas Yisroel (love of his fellow Jew). Though he is called the "Prophet of the Destruction," in truth, few prophets represented the building blocks of rehabilitation of the Jewish people more than Yirmiyahu.

SHABBOS DAY:

[G-d says to Yechezkel] "I shall give you a new heart, and I shall put a new spirit within you. I shall remove the heart of stone from within your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh." (Yechezkel 36:26)

We are told that our generation has hearts of stone. We are told that this is necessary, for if our hearts were made of flesh we could never survive all the troubles our people have gone through. It is, of course, figurative, and we are talking about a capacity to feel the reality of life.

This Tisha B'Av, I could feel my heart of stone. It was a day of remembering national destruction, with a new one coming on its heels, and I was not as moved as I ought to have been. Indeed, I had to fight to stay awake through the Kinos (I doven at Neitz), something I found somewhat distressing. My mind wanted to connect to the importance of the day, but my body just wasn't cooperating.

That was Sunday. On the other hand, yesterday, Thursday, I was sad and depressed. The events of the day were taking their toll on me. People from Gush Katif were calling in eye-witness accounts to people who would type them up and send them out on the spot. This, combined with the pictures of settlers and soldiers crying on each other over the very idea of Jews expelling Jews from Jewish land, made it past my emotional firewall and like a computer virus, began to take over my system.

Just as I had watched myself as an outsider on Sunday, marveling at how "out of it" I could be on such an important day, I marvel now at how much what is going on in this country is affecting me. I am sadder than I ever thought I would become, as if I personally know families there being evicted from their homes (with nowhere to go to), as if I had personally helped to build the settlement.

No, no heart of stone in me today. No, and not for the many soldiers who either rejected their mission, sabotaged it, or cried during it. Yes, there were "professional" policemen there capable of carrying out their duty with a ferociousness not even used on the real enemy, but I guess, not every heart of stone is going to melt at the End-of-Days.

Last night, as I tried to get a grasp of the situation and feeling unable to do so, I prayed to G-d while walking home from shul after Ma'ariv, for a little insight that might help reveal some hidden good amidst the apparent bad. I mean, how am I supposed to fit giving up a piece of Eretz Yisroel into my End-of-Days mindset?

Boruch Hashem, an answer came just 15 minutes later after receiving a phone call from a student of mine from America. She had just returned from a trip to Eretz Yisroel and was grappling with maintaining a connection to the Kotel while living thousands of miles away. The conversation turned to a discussion about stones that seem to have a heart, and hearts of stone, all of which led to the following posuk:

G-d, your G-d, will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your descendants, so you may love G-d, your G-d with all your heart, and with all your soul, in order that you may live. (Devarim 30:6)

And that is when my heart and mind came together once again, as if my heart was telling my mind, "Yeah, that's it. That's what is going on over here."

In fact, if I had to describe the effect of Hitnatkut on my heart, I'd have to say that it was as if a protective layer had been peeled away, leaving my heart vulnerable to the emotional turmoil of the

outside world. Indeed, one of the things that gnawed away at me yesterday was how I felt yesterday instead of the way I should have felt on Tisha B'Av. On Thursday I said Tehillim for the current crisis the way I should have said Kinot on Sunday for past ones.

Granted, it is much easier to feel something currently happening with live people than it is to feel about exiles from the past. Yes, we went through them, but we also lived past them. They're over now. The despair of those times has turned into the hope of the future in the present. On the other hand, who knows what the Jewish people must face next, and not just the settlers, but the entire nation, and not just in Eretz Yisroel, but all over the world?

So, I told myself, "G-d knows that." Indeed, all along I have been telling myself and others that the Final Redemption is at hand. When, exactly, I do not know. But it is close enough to talk about the events of the present in terms of the redemption of the future. I don't believe that what is happening today, or has happened over the last 15 years for that matter, is only a small and distant stepping stone on the path to national redemption. I believe that this is all part of "it."

Which is why, in my mind, Hitnalkut has to end in our favor, somehow. Not necessarily in a pleasant way, but favorably in terms of the ultimate goals of the Jewish people.

How could abandoning a section of Eretz Yisroel at this late stage of history be a step towards redemption, no matter what the Arabs claim about the land . . . no matter what the world dictates to the Israeli people . . . no matter what the Prime Minister and his cohorts are driven to do in the opposite direction of the national goals as spelled out by Torah?

Until last night when I was reminded of that posuk, I did not have an answer. Now, considering this posuk and the prophecy of Yechezkel, and seeing the effects of Hitnalkut on Jewish consciousness, I can't help but think of a new born Jewish baby about to enter the covenant of his Fathers, via a threshold called Bris Milah.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

Such judgments, they know them not (Bais-Lamed). (Tehillim 147:20)

There is another way of speaking about this, which also did not click in my mind until last night. This is the beauty of learning Kabbalah.

The Arizal taught:

Thus, when his (Adam HaRishon's) Nefesh reincarnated it first went to Shais, the son of Adam HaRishon. This caused the evil to be separated out, which was later given to Bilaam the Evil. Both of these levels, the good and the evil of the Nefesh had previously been included in Hevel, as his name alludes, with the "Heh" of "Hevel" alluding to the good which was given to Shais. This is the sod of the posuk, "Everything You placed (shattah) under his feet" (Tehillim 8:7), which has the letters "Shin-Tav" (Shais) and "Heh" (of Hevel). We have already explained that this psalm is about Moshe, about whom

it says, "Yet, You have made him only slightly less than angels" (Tehillim 8:6); and he is Shais, as we will soon explain. The evil of Hevel's Nefesh is represented by the letters Bais- Lamed, which is the sod of the posuk, "Such judgments, they know them not (Bais-Lamed)" (Tehillim 147:20). For, these two letters refer to the Klipos and the Bais-Lamed of Bilaam (BAIS-LAMED-Ayin-Mem). (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Ch. 29)

In other words, though Hevel seemed so pure according to the Torah's account of his short life, in truth, he too lacked perfection. Indeed, Kayin could only have murdered him if Hevel had been deemed worthy of such a punishment, or in need of such a tikun (Tifferes Tzion 22:2). The Arizal has revealed wherein lay that imperfection, or at least how it was represented in Hevel's name.

What is even more revealing is how central to the perfection of Creation the tikun of Hevel, of the Bais-Lamed, actually is:

... When all of the gilgulim of Hevel are complete, which is Moshe Rabbeinu who reincarnates into every generation to separate out the souls from amongst the spiritual waste, Moshiach will come. (Ibid., Ch. 20)

Thus, history is about rectifying the Bais-Lamed of Hevel, which is interesting because it just happens to be that the reverse of Bais-Lamed is Lamed-Bais - leiv (heart). This makes one wonder: Is Bais-Lamed a backward heart, or more precisely, a stone heart? Is that what history is about, about turning the Bais-Lamed around into Lamed-Bais, one of the final stages of transition in the Days of Moshiach?

Hence, like a new born baby, the Jewish people must cross a threshold. For seven days the new baby lives peacefully without a care in the world. However, by the ninth day he must have already entered into the covenant of Avraham Avinu. What stands in his way is the eighth day and Bris Milah - an operation of sorts that result in a little blood letting and some crying along the way.

Likewise, the exile is coming to an end. Our hearts of stone served us well on the one hand, and hindered us on the other. They protected us from feeling too much pain over the millennia, but they have also desensitized us to the reality of G-d, love of His Torah, and of His people. It has been a non-Messianic mentality that must change if we are going into transition into the next stage of history. The heart of stone is simply going to have to go.

Far be it from me to think that I can so easily make sense of G-d's master plan of history, especially when it gets so confusing. However, until this week, giving away a piece of Eretz Yisroel, uprooting heroic settlers from their self-built haven, handing it all over to people we know have no control over the people who wish to use Azza as a stepping stone to taking the rest of the country (having said so themselves repeatedly), did not fit into my End-of-Days vision. Now it does.

My only question is, how deep must the incision be before the stone hearts of those who remain unaffected by Hitnatkut are melted, before Jews of the Diaspora stop asking questions such as:

"What does aliyah or the security of Israel have to do with me?"

Or,

"Why would I ever consider leaving the security and comfort of the Diaspora for the insecurity and uncertainty of Israel?"

For, Dovid HaMelech summed up Heaven's expectations of the generation of Moshiach in this way:

You will arise and show Tzion mercy, for the time to favor her, for the appointed time will have come. For Your servants have cherished her stones and favor her dust. (Tehillim 102:14-15)

Hence, the Geulah Shlaimah depends upon surrendering and turning in our hearts of stone for the stones of Eretz Yisroel. Geulah Shlaimah is a matter of the heart.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Don't spy after the desires of your hearts and your eyes. (Bamidbar 15:39)

This posuk, of course, is from the end of Parashas Shlach, the parshah of the spies who did what the Torah is now telling us not to do. The Talmud says regarding Eichah, the account of the destruction of the First Temple and the exile of its surviving Jews:

Why does the letter Peh come before the letter Ayin? Because of the spies who spoke about that which their eyes did not see. (Sanhedrin 104b)

The stanzas of Eichah were arranged by Yirmiyahu according to the Aleph- Bais, to teach us that if we don't obey the rules of G-d's world that was made with the Aleph-Bais, then that same Aleph-Bais becomes the source of our own suffering and demise. The only exception to the order is with respect to the letters of Ayin and Peh, whose chronological order Yirmiyahu reversed. The Talmud has explained why.

In other words, the spies put their mouths (Peh) before their eyes (Ayin), so-to-speak. However, as Rashi points out, they did indeed speak about what they saw:

They brought back to the Children of Israel an evil report of the land which they had searched, saying, "The land which we investigated is a land that eats up its inhabitants." (Bamidbar 13:32)

"In every place we passed we found them burying their dead!" However, the truth was that The Holy One, Blessed is He, did this for their good, to involve them [the inhabitants of Canaan] in mourning to distract them from paying attention to the spies." (Rashi)

Well, yes and no. Apparently, the issue was not about what their eyes actually beheld, but about what their minds perceived. They misconstrued what they saw, seeing problems in making aliyah where they did not exist, making mountains out of mole hills, and vice versa. Their hearts, at that stage of the journey, just weren't into making aliyah.

However, if one views the world through the eyes of Bais-Lamed, the following results:

The heart and the eyes are the spies of the body; that is, they lead a person to transgress: the eyes see, the heart covets, and the body transgresses. (Rashi, Bamidbar 15:39)

However, view the world through the eyes of Lamed-Bais (a heart of flesh) and it is a different scenario altogether, one of redemption:

The two men then returned and descended from the mountain; they crossed [the Jordan] and came to Yehoshua son of Nun and told him all that had happened to them. They said to Yehoshua, "G-d has given the land into our hands; and all the inhabitants of the land have even melted because of us." (Yehoshua 2:23-24)

It is a whole different vision, the vision that is spoken about in this week's parshah which begins with the words:

SEE, I present before you today . . .

See what? See the truth. See clearly. See with a leiv (Lamed-Bais), not with the empty vision of ba'al (Bais- Lamed). The vision of Amalek is senseless, heartless, and it has greatly affected the Jewish people. I am totally amazed at how many Jewish leaders have congratulated Prime Minister Sharon on evicting his own people to leave behind a power vacuum that is sure to haunt the State of Israel in just a matter of months from now.

And again, in the name of which higher cause?

I am absolutely awestruck by how many Jews the world over think that what just happened was a good thing for the Jewish people, when all that really happened was an Israeli government, that has no G-dly vision, no sense of Jewish history, no real mandate for the future of Eretz Yisroel, briefly squirming out from between a hard rock and a wall. Once again, we have sold off the future for the sake of the present, something the Western world does as a matter of everyday life.

If you were to ask me, I'd have to say that the ultimate circumcision of the Jewish heart will not occur before Moshiach arrives, only after. If I am right, and I sincerely hope that I am wrong, that will probably mean that until that time, a lot of hearts will remain stone and so will their viewpoints. For them, black will remain white and white will seem black, and a lot of good people will suffer the consequences as a result.

However, just like after every Bris, this one will also end in celebration when we all truly learn how to feel with a true heart of a Jew, and to SEE with truly Jewish eyes.

Have a great Shabbos,
PW

This week's parshah sheet is dedicated to Shaynah bas Madelyn and Baruch Berel ben Lebah. May they merit a complete and speedy recovery.

Text

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