

NUN TOO LATE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

G-d told Moshe, "Tell the Children of Israel that if a woman conceives and gives birth to a male then she will be ritually unclean for seven days . . ." (Vayikra 12:1-2)

At first, this dvar Torah seems as if it really belongs to Parashas BeHa'alo'secha. However, at the end it will be clear that it also belongs to this parshah.

In Parashas BeHa'aslo'secha, the parshah is divided into three parts: from the beginning of the parshah until 10:35, and the discussion about the moving of the Holy Ark to initiate the journey, the few pesukim of that section, and then from 11:1 and the complaint about the manna. The middle section is demarcated on both sides by the same Hebrew letter, a Nun, except that in each case it is inverted.

Why this unique situation? As Rashi explains, to separate between one punishment and another. In other words, the section about the Ark belongs elsewhere, at the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar, but it was "borrowed" and placed here to act as a barrier between two negative episodes: the complaining about the manna, and the leaving of Mt. Sinai too quickly.

In fact, Tosfos explains (Shabbos 116a), the Jewish people left Har Sinai like school children who hear the bell that ends the school day. You can tell who likes school when the bell rings, those who linger around as if they didn't hear the bell at all. Those who left like a shot were really gone before they left, and so were the Jewish people from Har Sinai. But what does that have to do with inverted Nuns?

This:

Fifty Gates of Understanding were created in the world . . . (Rosh Hashanah 21b)

Otherwise known in Hebrew as the NUN Sha'arei Binah, the Fifty Gates of Understanding represent the perfect knowledge of G-d, at least as much as is humanly possible. This is true Da'as Elokim (G-dly Knowledge) and the goal of Torah learning made possible through the learning of Pardes - Pshat, Remez, Drush and Sod. This level of knowledge is both the product of and what leads to the Ohr HaGanuz, the Hidden Light of Creation regarding which the Talmud says:

With the light that The Holy One, Blessed is He, made on Day One, Adam was able to see from one end of the world until its end. (Chagigah 12a)

So what? Beyond not needing binoculars to see far away, what distinctly was this advantage?

The answer is that it provided Adam HaRishon with far more than a long- distance physical view; it gave him a long distance spiritual view. It was a vision of Creation through the eyes of the Creator that allowed Adam to understand the essence of everything within Creation and its role in the Master Plan, including his own role. He had the ultimate big picture associated with the Aitz HaChaim, the level on which he actually lived until he gained his internal yetzer hara.

On this level, there is no mistaking the hand of G-d. For the person living on this level of intellectual and spiritual clarity, there is no hester panim (the hiding of G-d's face). That is why Haman was hanged on his own gallows that were fifty amos high, for it is Sod, the actual level of the Aitz HaChaim that ultimately chokes Amalek and eliminates the doubt in G-d with which he is associated.

According to the Vilna Gaon, this is hinted to in the following posuk:

"Place it in the ears of (b'aznei) Yehoshua, that I will surely erase the memory of Amalek' (Shemos 17:14).

In gematria, the word b'aznei (in the ears) indicates that Moshe told Yeshoshua, from the tribe of Ephraim from whom Moshiach Ben Yosef descends, the only way to fight Amalek is through Sod, because only Sod is powerful enough to see through the screen of doubt that Amalek projects. Amalek is both, the result of hester panim and the propagator of it. The Nun Sha'arei Binah can cut through it and see Divine Providence on every level of existence.

SHABBOS DAY:

... As the days of which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and the month which had been turned about for them from one of sorrow to one of gladness ... (Esther 9:22)

Even though Tosfos compares the way the Jewish people left Har Sinai to that of an anxious school child who leaves at the ring of the bell, Har Sinai was far more than the average school experience. At their lowest point, the Jewish people had descended to the forty-ninth level of spiritual impurity while in Egypt, the ultimate in hester panim. At that point, a person's view is so secular that he can't see the hand of G-d even if it shakeshim.

Thus, there are forty-nine days in the Omer-Count and the Jewish people received Torah at Mt. Sinai on the fiftieth day. Each day they climbed another rung on the ladder towards the fiftieth gate of wisdom, a process that began with the plagues back in Egypt. Each plague revealed the hand of G-d a little more, slowly nourishing the Jewish people back to spiritual health like one might do for a person who has fasted for an extended period of time.

The Har Sinai Experience was meant to bring the Jewish people to the fiftieth gate of understanding, the level, according to the Pri Tzaddik, is reserved for Ba'alei Teshuvah. Had Moshe Rabbeinu come all the way down the mountain with the first set of Tablets, which were on the level of the Aitz

HaChaim and what is called Toras Atzilus, the Torah of Yemos HaMoshiach (Sod), the Jewish people would have gone from strength and straight to Eretz Yisroel which exists on this level.

The Erev Rav put an end to that. Taking advantage of a misunderstanding regarding the return time of Moshe Rabbeinu, the Erev Rav incited panic and instigated the fashioning of the golden calf. What they were really doing was making sure that the Luchos Rishonos (the First Set of Tablets), did not make it down the mountain and into the possession of the Jewish people, for that would have put an end to the Erev Rav altogether.

They won, at least for the time being. When Moshe smashed those tablets, necessitating the need for a second, less holy set, the ladder up to the Nun Sha'arei Binah all of a sudden got longer, too long to climb as an entire nation. Running away from Har Sinai was just an indication of where their Da'as was holding at that time, which was upside down, just like the inverted Nun in the Torah. And, everything that was going to go wrong from that point onward until this very day was the result of our incomplete and inverted Da'as.

That is why the Purim story comes down to one word:

... As the days of which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and the month which had been turned about (nepach: Nun-Heh-Peh-Chof) for them from one of sorrow to one of gladness ...
(Esther 9:22)

This means that the situation flip-flopped. One day Haman (Heh-Mem-Nun) which can be read: Heim Nun - they are fifty - was poised to destroy the Jewish people with everything in place to carry out his plan, and the next day he was dead hanging from the same fifty-amah high gallows that he built to hang Mordechai HaTzaddik on. Just like that and in the blink of an eye.

However, the word nepach can be read: Nun hafuch - overturned Nun. It was the month that the Nun was overturned for them, and it is not too difficult to figure out which one. In other words, whatever it was that the Jewish people lost by leaving Har Sinai too quickly, either spiritually, physically, or both, they regained at Purim time, and the Talmud indicates this as well:

And they stood under the mount ... (Shemos 19:17); Rav Avdimi bar Chama bar Chasa said: "This teaches that The Holy One, blessed is He, overturned the mountain upon them like an [inverted] cask, and said to them, 'If you accept the Torah, it is well; if not, here shall be your burial.' " Rav Acha bar Ya'acov said, "This provides a strong case against the Torah." Rava answered, "Nevertheless, they re-accepted it in the days of Achashveros, for it is written, '[the Jews] confirmed, and took upon them ...' (Esther 9:27)." (Shabbos 88a)

Thus, Purim was the completion of the Har Sinai experience. The only question is if that is true, why did everything continue to go wrong from that point onward?

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

For Mordechai the Jew was viceroy to King Achashveros; he was a great man among the Jews, and found favor with the majority of his brothers . . . (Esther 10:3)

With the majority of his brothers? Only the majority and not ALL of his brothers, in spite of all he had done to save them? The Ibn Ezra calls it the power of jealousy, but we might as well call it the power of the inverted Nun.

Indeed, when Ezra HaSofer finally decided to return to Eretz Yisroel and put out the call for all of the Jews to also come home. Jews that had originally cried on their way out of Israel while going into exile did not respond well to the offer. On the contrary, most chose to remain in exile, and the second temple ended up being only the second temple instead of the final one.

What went wrong?

The answer is the same as that for another difficult question: How could Moshe Rabbeinu break the Luchos Rishonos? We don't even let a man-made Sefer Torah that was written on by man fall on the ground even accidentally; how could Moshe allow the Luchos Rishonos that were carved out by G-d and written on by G-d break on purpose? Why didn't he just leave them there on top of the mountain where they would be safe?

The answer is not what it seems to be. True, Moshe Rabbeinu broke the tablets in anger on behalf of G-d, but he also did so on behalf of the Jewish people. It was the sacrifice he made, and for which G-d later congratulated him, to make sure that if the Jewish people could not receive this set of tablets, they could at least see them once, if only from a distance. It was a taste from the Aitz HaChaim just as we sank down to the level of the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah - the root of Haman and Amalek, all over again after the incident with the golden calf.

But what a taste it was. According to the Pri Tzaddik, that impression left a lasting impression on the hearts of Klal Yisroel until this very day, thanks to Moshe Rabbeinu. For, how can you return to that which you never had a connection to in the first place? How can you know what it is you seek if you never saw it in the first place? Therefore, just as an angel teaches us all of Torah in the womb before making us forget it at birth, Moshe showed us the Torah of Yemos HaMoshiach just before taking it away from us.

Only physically, but not spiritually.

And, that too was Purim. As the Megillah testifies, the Nun that inverted again to become right side up, clearly revealing the hand of G-d in ALL the affairs of the Jewish people to the last itty-bitty detail, re- inverted after the miracle was over. It was gone about as fast as it came, but not as if it had never been there at all. It left its impression, and it remains off in the distance like the dim light of a distance ship on its way to save us from drowning in a sea of spiritual impurity.

Which brings us, at last, to our parshah.

MELAVE MALKAH:

On the eighth day his foreskin must be circumcised. For the next 33 days it will be a period of time during which her blood will be considered ritually clean. (Vayikra 12:3-4)

Interesting how the Torah inserts the mitzvah of Bris Milah on the eighth day in-between two laws of spiritual impurity to do with childbirth. What's the connection?

It is basic but profound. Spiritual impurity encompasses the forty-nine levels that the Fifty Gates of Understanding and Bris Milah come to eradicate. That is why a Bris takes place on the eighth day - one more than seven, which has the properties of the fiftieth - one more day than seven times seven. In fact, the insertion of Bris Milah between these two sections of spiritual impurity is reminiscent of the section about the Aron HaKodesh being inserted between the two sins of the Jewish people. Each act is an island of rectification amidst a sea of Klipos and spiritual impurity.

Indeed, the foreskin itself symbolizes the Klipos and the control they have on man to abuse Creation. By removing it and by drawing down the power of eight, the power of chayn - Ches-Nun, or 8 and 50, the reaching the Klipos and the Erev Rav is reduced significantly, preparing the child to ascend in the direction of the Nun Sha'arei Binah, to re-invert the Nun in his personal life, and if he's really good, the Nun of the Jewish people, in general.

That is the role of Moshiach Ben Yosef, which is why he is associated with Bris Milah. As the Shem M'Shmuel explains (Vayishlach), he is compared to an ox because, like the ox he breaks the ground and prepares it for planting and harvesting. That is what Moshiach Ben Yosef will do to the hearts of Klal Yisroel in preparation for Moshiach Ben Dovid.

And how will he do that? Says the Vilna Gaon, we learn this from Yosef HaTzaddik himself, who was called Tzafnas Panayach (Revealer of Secrets) by Pharaoh, since it was Yosef who revealed the hand of G-d in history in his time. Just as Bris Milah removes the outer layer to reveal the holiness within, and to do this in the final generation, says the GR"A, he will use Sod - the inner soul of Torah.

Indeed, the Final Redemption is described in the Torah in terms of Bris Milah:

Only your fathers did G-d desire to love them, and He has chosen their descendants after them through you from all the peoples this day. He will circumcise the foreskin of your hearts and you will no longer be stiff-necked. (Devarim 10:16-17)

The result of this:

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

The way He was before Adam HaRishon ate from the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah and first inverted the Nun Sha'arei Binah resulting in expulsion from Gan Aiden. The way He was before the sin of the golden calf. And, if you listen real carefully, you can hear some of the twisting and turning necessary to re-invert the Nun once and for all.

Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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