

UP A TREE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

This week's parshah sheet is dedicated to the refuah shlaimah of Elisheva Chana bas Sarah. May the merit of the reading of the following divrei Torah act as a great zechus to provide her with a quick and complete recovery.

FRIDAY NIGHT:

And Yisro, priest of Midian, father-in-law of Moshe, heard . . . (Shemos 18:1)

Stop right there. These words alone give a lot of information and insight. What did Yisro hear? He heard about the miraculous destruction of Egypt, the miracle of the splitting of the Red Sea, and the fantastic victory over the people of Amalek. And, because of all this he came out to the desert to join the Jewish people. He HEARD it, it left a lasting impression upon him, and thus it moved him to come closer to G-d and the Jewish people and convert - in spite of the fact that he had been a priest to idol worship.

On the other hand, he was already the father-in-law of Moshe Rabbeinu. That also had to count for a lot, already being connected to the leader of the miracle-causing nation through marriage. His daughter was part of that nation now, not to mention his two grandsons as well; he could only gain by becoming part of the Jewish people.

The point is that ONLY Yisro heard, in spite of everything that had occurred for the sake of the Jewish people. People read about it in the papers and saw it on the 11 o'clock news. It caught their attention and perhaps even captivated their imagination for a while, but it did little or nothing to change their ways of life. If natural disasters that can be traced directly to G-d can't move mankind to make massive moral changes, how then can we expect natural disasters with a less obvious link to G-d to wake up mankind?

The answer is we can't and don't have to, for G-d is the perfect archer; He never misses His target. If he wants to wake up all of mankind to make serious lifestyle changes, He can do it in a flash (but hopefully won't have to). If He didn't do it, then it is because He never intended to do it in the first place, which means the message, as massive and overwhelming as it may have been was only meant for the handful of Yisros living at that time who had ears to hear and minds to appreciate what is being communicated.

Free-will demands it be that way. As the Talmud states:

He who troubles himself Erev Shabbos, eats on Shabbos, but he who does not trouble himself on Erev Shabbos, from what will he eat? (Avodah Zarah 3a)

This is the analogy the Talmud uses to explain why people who do not do mitzvos in this world do not have a portion in the World-to-Come. For, like Shabbos, once sundown occurs (i.e., Yemos HaMoshiach begins), creative activity must cease (i.e., free-will is no longer possible and therefore the chance to earn reward for doing a mitzvah is gone), and you have to eat on Shabbos (i.e., in the World-to-Come) only that which was prepared before that point (i.e., that is, the reward for the mitzvos that were performed in this world).

However, it is an analogy for all of life. For what makes a crisis a crisis is the way it springs up on us all-of-a-sudden with very little warning, if any at all. Surviving the crisis, experience proves, depends upon one's advance state of readiness, and usually with lots of help from Heaven. Indeed, the less one is ready in advance, the greater the miracle it takes to save oneself at a time of crisis.

Thus, when the Torah tell us that G-d hardened the heart of Pharaoh, it means that He created crises for him in a way that took advantage of Pharaoh's attitude towards truth. It wasn't that G-d was trying to deliberately trick Pharaoh just to make a mockery of him, because the same Talmud says that G-d does not do that. It is our desire to know truth and live by it that is the merit we need to work with G-d to bring Creation to fulfillment, and the lack of which transforms one into a pawn to accomplish the same purpose.

Hence, when the plagues occurred they did so in a way that Pharaoh's dishonest and overly proud approach to life could not let him see the hand of G-d in what was occurring, though other people not as great as he with better attitudes could see it quite well. His own people were screaming at him, "Can't you see that it is the G-d of the Jews who is doing all this to us, destroying Egypt in the process?!" Yet, Pharaoh just kept on going thinking that at some point he'd get the upper hand and reverse all that had already occurred.

That is why the Torah tells us that Yisro was a priest of Midian. We must know why it was only that one person who could hear the message of all that had been done on behalf of B'nei Yisroel, and it wasn't just because he was the father-in-law of Moshe Rabbeinu. That helped, for sure, but it was his drive for spirituality, even though it had previously been misplaced, that left him with open ears and a sensitive heart to hear what others could not, and run towards the truth when the opportunity arose.

SHABBOS DAY:

On the third day in the morning, there was thunder and lightning, and a heavy cloud upon the mountain, and the voice of the shofar was very strong. The people in the camp trembled. Moshe directed the people out of the camp towards G-d, and they placed themselves at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was smoking, because G-d came down on it in fire. The smoke rose like the smoke of a furnace; the whole mountain trembled. (Shemos 19:16-18)

Here come the Ten Commandments, and the rest of Torah for that matter. The sequence of events is world-famous. The Jewish people come to Mt. Sinai, G-d tells them the Ten Commandments, Moshe Rabbeinu ascends the mountain to receive the rest of the Torah, and forty days later returns to find the golden calf in the camp below, compelling him to throw down and break the two tablets upon which the Torah was written by G-d Himself, breaking them into many pieces.

Next, there was the purging of the camp. The perpetrators were killed and the rest of the Jewish people lamented what had happened. The entire process of repentance lasted another forty days after which Moshe Rabbeinu ascended a second time to appeal to G-d's mercy on behalf of the survivors of the purge, and to receive a second set of tablets. At the end of forty days, the day after the first Yom Kippur, Moshe Rabbeinu came down holding a second set of Luchos (Tablets) just like the first set.

Or, were they just like the first set?

The answer is quite Kabbalistic, and from the Leshem (my comments are in square brackets).

And now we will explain the additional words of the Zohar HaKodesh regarding our matter. It says:

They correspond to two eyes from which two tears go down into a great sea. For, Chochmah is called eyes . . .

[Our physical bodies mirror the spiritual Ten Sefiros, and our bodily parts are just physical projections of spiritual realities and concepts. Therefore, just as we possess physical eyes there is a spiritual reality within the sefiros representing a certain level of Divine light to which our own eyes correspond.]

. . . and the right eye corresponds to the Upper Chochmah [Wisdom] and the left eye corresponds to the Lower Chochmah.

[Again, levels in the Sefiros.]

Why did tears go down? Because, with these first two tablets Moshe brought Torah down to Israel, that is Binah and Malchus . . .

[That is, Understanding and Kingdom - the third and tenth sefirah from the top.]

The right tablet was b'sod Binah and the left was Malchus, and they corresponded to two eyes.

[In other words, the tablets were physical representations of certain levels of light in the Sefiros, the right one emanating from the sefirah of Binah and the left one from Malchus.]

Israel did not merit them, because they broke and fell as a result of the sin of the golden calf . . .
(Bereishis 26b)

For, the first set of tablets were from the Netzach and Hod of Zehr Anpin, while the second set were

from the Netzach and Hod of the Nukveh, as the Rav wrote in Sha'ar Leah v'Rachel, Chapter 6.

[Netzach is the seventh sefirah from the top in any system of ten sefiros, and Hod is the eighth. Zehr Anpin, literally "Small Face" refers to a sub- system - a partzuf - comprised of the six sefiros of Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod, and Yesod, while Nukveh is the name of the partzuf that is made up of the Malchus. Thus the Rav, that is, the Arizal, provided the precise spiritual coordinates for the location of both sets of tablets within the Sefiros.]

The Netzach and Hod of Zehr Anpin are from the sod of Aitz HaChaim, because the Chitzonim cannot reach them. See the GR"A in Safra D'Tzniusa, Ch. 3 (q.v., Inyan Klal u'Prat); see there. However, the Netzach and Hod of the Nukveh are b'sod Aitz HaDa'as, as it is known, b'sod "Her feet go down to death" (Mishlei 5:5).

[Thus, the second set of tablets were to the first set what the Tree of Knowledge was to the Tree of Life. The Chitzonim - Externalities - is the name of the negative force within Creation that derives its sustenance by latching onto kedushah and drawing from it, channeling its energy in the direction of evil. However, the first set of tablets like the Tree of Life, unlike the second set of tablets and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil were on too high a level to be reached by evil, and were therefore protected from the Chitzonim. The posuk from Mishlei is talking about false philosophies that lead in the wrong spiritual direction, and hence, death. On the level of Sod it is an allusion to the lower level of light of the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah which can be accessed by the Chitzonim who cause death.]

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

They were the handiwork of G-d, and the writing was G-d's . . . (Shemos 32:16)

It further says:

>From what were the Luchos made? We learned from the Upper Dew that comes from Atika Kadisha . . . [(i.e., the Keser) and when it flowed to the Holy Apple Field (i.e., the Malchus), The Holy One, Blessed is He, took two cups from them and hardened them, and from this two precious stones were made. He blew into them and they expanded to become two tablets, as it says, "They were the handiwork of G-d, and the writing was G-d's" (Shemos 32:16).] (Yisro 84b)

[The same "dew" (read: Holy and Sublime Light), no doubt, that will be used in Techiyas HaMeisim to bring the dead back to life.]

And they say:

Had they not broken, all that came to the world after would not have been, and Israel would have been like the upper angels. (Mishpatim 114a)

All of this is because the first set of tablets were from the sod of the Aitz HaChaim and from the Netzach and Hod of Zehr Anpin. And, the eyes of Zehr Anpin are from the Netzach and Hod of his

Chochmah, as mentioned before, and they are on the same level.

[In other words, within the Chochmah of Zehr Anpin there is a subset of ten more sefiros, and the Netzach and Hod of this system are the root of the level of light called the eyes of Zehr Anpin. Furthermore, the Netzach and Hod themselves of Zehr Anpin are also rooted in the Netzach and Hod of the Chochmah of Zehr Anpin, and . . .]

Therefore, when the Luchos were broken the pain reached all the way up there and two tears fell from the eyes.

[Pain, in this case, is used as analogy to describe an effect in the Sefiros due to the breaking of the tablets. Working very much the same way that pain works in the human body, the pain being referred to here is a signal to the brain, in this case higher levels of sefiros - Keser, Chochmah, and Binah - to respond in a particular way to avoid further damage to the overall system, as the Leshem will explain.]

This is what it said:

Why did tears go down? Because, with these two tablets Moshe brought Torah down to Israel, that is Binah and Malchus. The right tablet was b'sod Binah and the left was Malchus, and they corresponded to two eyes. Israel did not merit them, because they broke and fell as a result of the sin of the golden calf . . . (Bereishis 26b)

The tears were for the sake of sweetening the dinim (judgment) so that Israel would not be destroyed, G-d forbid.

And, as we said before, they [i.e., the Luchos] were from the Binah and Malchus, as it says (Shemos 9b), and thus, as a result of the breaking of the Luchos that were from the Netzach and Hod of Zehr Anpin, the Second Temple was destroyed since it was the Malchus that was built from the Netzach, Hod, and Yesod of Zehr Anpin.

[The Second Temple was the physical projection of the light of the sefirah called Malchus that was the result of light that came from the Netzach, Hod, and Yesod of Zehr Anpin. Breaking the Luchos weakened the flow of the light from those sefiros, which resulted in a spiritual vulnerability for the future Second Temple and eventually, its physical destruction.

But, what about the First Temple?]

MELAVE MALKAH:

G-d said to Moshe, "Carve out two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write upon these tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke." (Shemos 34:1)

[Regarding the First Temple, the Leshem explains:]

. . . And since the blemish reached to the Netzach and Hod of the Chochmah [of Zehr Anpin], the First

Temple was destroyed which was from Binah which [in turn] was built from the Netzach, Hod, and Yesod of Abba [Chochmah].

[Thus, though the damage in the Sefiros was greater at the lower levels, since it affected the upper levels, a spiritual vulnerability existed for the First Temple as well.]

Why did they fall? Because the [letter] Vav from them flew away, the Vav from "and He created (VAV-Yud-Yud-Tzaddi-Raish) them" (Bereishis 2:7). It is the light of the Upper Da'as, sod of the Aitz HaChaim, the Ohr HaGanuz from the Six Days of Creation that returned and was revealed through the Luchos Rishonos (the First Tablets).

[The initial light of Creation was a spiritual one, with which Adam HaRishon could see from one end of the world until the other end (Chagigah 12a). To protect it from abuse, G-d hid it on the first day of Creation and hence it is called the Ohr HaGanuz (the Hidden Light). Imbued with this light, also referred to as the Upper Da'as (Upper Knowledge) and represented by the letter Vav, the Luchos were physically visible but of a spiritual existence, completely supernatural. Thus, Moshe Rabbeinu was able to carry them as if they had been far lighter than they actually were.]

As a result of the golden calf it went up, in the same manner that the Zehira Ila'a flew up from Adam HaRishon after he sinned through the Aitz HaDa'as.

[The Zehira Ila'a was an extremely high level of soul that Adam HaRishon possessed before he sinned, the source of his tremendous holiness.]

Likewise, the Talmud says:

The Tablets broke and the letters flew up (Pesachim 87b). (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 453)

Thus, spiritually-speaking there was a huge difference between the First Tablets and the Second Tablets, - physically as well. For, the First Tablets were carved out by G-d and engraved by Him, whereas Moshe Rabbeinu was the one who carved out the second set of tablets upon which G-d wrote.

Furthermore, the First Tablets were imbued with the Ohr HaGanuz and totally supernatural, which had not been the case with the second set of tablets. They remained with the Jewish people until they were hidden somewhere in the Temple Mount many hundreds of years later. The letters on the First Tablet could thus fly back to Heaven, unlike the letters of the second, far more physical tablets.

In essence, what this amounts to is that the Torah we possess is not without the Ohr HaGanuz, but that its Ohr HaGanuz is buried below layers of physicality that one must work through to access this sublime and holy light. And, ultimately speaking, that is what learning Torah and performing mitzvos are all about. They are a map to a buried treasure, the one with which G-d made Creation and gave the Torah. And, the one with which He will bring the Final Redemption, may it happen in our time.

Have a great Shabbos,

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