

TO BE "FIRED"

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

G-d spoke to Moshe, saying, "Speak to Aharon and say to him: When you kindle the lamps-beha'alotecha-toward the face of the Menorah should the seven lamps cast light." (Bamidbar 8:1)

That the flames rise upward, and expression of ascending is used, implying that one must kindle them until the light ascends on its own. (Rashi)

In other words, the word "beha'alotecha" is not normally used to describe the idea of lighting something, indicating some deeper meaning behind this important process of lighting the Menorah. And, given that the Menorah alludes to a higher, more revealed level of Divine Providence, which is why it became the symbol of Chanukah, the message must be profound, especially while living in exile, as we do today.

To try and understand this message, begin by imagining that you work in a big company which, like all large companies has a hierarchy of staff. At the top of the totem pole (literally, being 50 floors up in the executive suite with an exquisite view), is the CEO (Corporate Executive Officer). At the bottom are the thousands of employees that keep the CEO in business, and he only ventures down to see his employees on rare occasions.

In between the two is Middle Management, responsible for transmitting the will of the CEO into work directives for the employees, and communicating the complaints of the employees to the boss to make sure the company remains productive. This is the way a large company works on a day-to-day basis.

One day, a large order comes in with a deadline that demands that the employees put in an extra special effort in order to fill the order on time. The CEO and his management work out a plan, which then filters on down through Middle Management before being implemented by the "Floor Boss," whose responsibility it is to utilize every employee to the company's maximum advantage.

Production begins, and the bosses are optimistic, providing the CEO with an upbeat report that gives him the impression that he can carry on with his own business, leaving the responsibility of production to those under him. There is only so much he can keep his finger on at one time, and that's why he has hired twenty Middle Management personnel.

However, complications develop and production falls off schedule somewhat, and concerns are

expressed. A meeting is held, and it is decided that overtime will be necessary to meet the deadline. It will affect the profit margin, but the company's reputation is also at stake, so the CEO gives his approval, and night shifts begin.

Nevertheless, in spite of the extra effort and money spent, projections show that at the current rate of production the company will still not meet its commitment on time. Another meeting is called, and an assessment is made as to whether or not the company can make do with its present number of staff, or will it be forced to farm out some of the work, greatly affecting the anticipated profits for such a project.

It is decided that the only way to increase production will be to inspire the workers to work harder than normal, not an easy job, even with the promise of a bonus. It is also decided that the only way to inspire the workers is if the CEO goes down the fifty floors to address the thousands of employees himself. The date and location of the meeting is decided, and the memorandum goes out to announce the event.

"Wow, Mr. Hammond himself?" one worker says to his buddy as he reads the sign on the board.

"Yeah, I don't even think I remember what he looks like. The last time I saw his face was in some business magazine years ago!" his buddy responds.

"Well, it can't be good," a third employee adds, "if the big cheese himself is coming down to meet with us lowly beings."

"Yeah, but he can't be coming down to fire anyone. He leaves that to the guys below him so they can take the heat," the first one explains.

"I don't know," the second one says, "if you ask me, it is kind of exciting. Makes you feel more important to the company when the CEO himself comes down to talk to you."

"Exciting . . . and scary . . ." the third one says. "Whatever the reason, you can be sure it is not to make a picnic . . . and I'm sure that whatever he says is for the good of the company, not for our good."

"What are you talking about?" the second employee retorts, "If the company benefits, it's not good for us?"

"Yeah," the first one agrees with his buddy. "If the company makes money, we make money."

SHABBOS DAY:

A song to the ascents. I raise my eyes upon the mountains; whence- m'Ayin - will come my help?
(Tehillim 121:1)

Dovid HaMelech was in great trouble. Being pursued by the king of Israel who wanted nothing less than his death, he was trapped. He could not see any natural way out of his situation. Thus, the Kabbalists explain, he looked for a solution beyond the realm of nature, calling out to "Ayin" for

salvation, and what seems to be a question of bewilderment ("Whence will come my help) was really a pointed question at the Source of Hashgochah Pratis itself: Ayin.

You can think of Creation as a spiritual skyscraper, with mankind, the employee working on the bottom floor, and G-d, the CEO, occupying the top floor. In-between is Middle Management which we refer to as the Sefirot, whose job it is to run the business on behalf of the CEO on a day-to-day basis.

What do we produce? Tikun Olam. We are in the business of rectifying Creation and bringing it to fulfillment, possibly early, but definitely by a specific final deadline. And, for the most part everything runs smoothly, and though we know the CEO is on top of everything, figuratively and literally, we rarely ever see His face. Instead, we see Nature.

In other words, there are different levels of Hashgochah (Divine Providence) that governs the world. All of them belong to G-d, but each level up is a great revelation of His Providence, with a miracle being the highest level of all. It is when the CEO of Creation, comes down to the floor, so-to-speak, to address the people Himself.

In Kabbalistic terminology, this is the level of Providence called "Ayin," or that of Arich Anpin, the level of Keter in the Sefirot. And, as the Leshem points out, though it permeates every level of Creation on a day-to- basis, it is hidden behind so many levels that it is only perceptible if one goes to great effort to see it.

One thing is for certain: when It reveals Itself, history changes dramatically and quickly, and rarely in ways we understand. Like any CEO, G-d's perception incorporates the past, present, and future; indeed, G-d is the only "CEO" who is truly omnipotent, and therefore His logic is often hidden from us, because we cannot see history as He does, until after the fact.

Thus, when Moshe Rabbeinu was on top of Har Sinai and asked G-d to show him the great Rebi Akiva, he had a vision of the great teacher giving a shiur to his students some time in the future. But, when Moshe then asked to see his reward for teaching Torah, he had a vision of his violent death at the hands of the barbaric Romans.

"This is Torah, and this is its reward?!" the great Moshe Rabbeinu asked, to which G-d answered, "Silence! This is what I have thought to do!" (Menachos 29b)

Yet, for the students of Rebi Akiva who had witnessed the horrible death of the great and devoted teacher, there were no such questions. They had lived in Rebi Akiva's time, and were fully aware of the punishment for teaching Torah in public. This is what Rebi Akiva had been caught doing, and he fulfilled his destiny as a martyr. His death was the "natural" outcome of the events that had led to it.

Likewise, we are told, the great rabbis of that time said, "Let Moshiach come, but let me have no part in it!"

Why?! Why would such great people be afraid to live in our time, when their time was clearly far more dangerous. In their time, the Romans ruled the land and death was far more imminent for the Jewish people that they even considered national suicide, rather than suffer cruel fates at the hands of a blood-thirsty enemy.

After all, in our time we have it good. The world is more civilized, and technology has blessed us with a far higher standard of living. True, we are still scattered around the world, and worst than this is the fact that 80 percent of the Jewish people are not religious and intermarriage is rampant. But, in their times, poverty and famine were rampant, and you could not learn Torah in any kind of security.

On the contrary! We say, "Thank G-d we live in our time, and not in the time of the Tannaim when Jews were slaughtered left, right, and center!"

We go to bed each night, quite unaffected by the spiritual status of the Jewish nation today, as if G-d barely cares that four out of every five of his children have forsaken Him and His Torah. And, so many of those who keep His Torah have little or no desire whatsoever, after thousands of years of exile, to make their way back home to the land He swore to give them.

How illogical can you get?

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

This is from G-d, that which is wondrous in our eyes. (Tehillim 118:23)

Wondrous in our eyes? What about the fact that, in 1988 the Palestinians successfully usurped the Jewish nation's role of David against Goliath, gaining support for a homeland that really has little to do with them in the first place.

It reminds me of the way that George Bush, Sr., as Vice President under Ronald Reagan, had vociferously criticized the Israelis for their attack on the Iraqi reactor, calling for sanctions against them. Yet, ten years later he celebrated victory over the Iraqi army after expelling them from Kuwait, something Dick Cheney told David Ivry, the Israeli Ambassador to the United States at the time, and who had also been responsible for the mission, that had it not been for that attack of Iraq's nuclear reactor, Desert Storm would not have been successful.

Speaking of which, the attack on that reactor was so successful against the odds, that one can't help but wonder, "On what level of Divine Providence did that occur?"

And then the Six-Day War had secular Israelis talking in the streets of Tel Aviv of miracles, the signature of Arich Anpin.

Indeed, Israel's existence over the last six decades has been nothing but supernatural, especially when you consider the odds of survival given Israel's location and the intentions and ability of its neighbors.

Was it logical for Hamas to win the Palestinian election, or is it logical for the world to acknowledge their success and try to find a way to work with them? Is it logical to give away more land to a people who is supported by Iran, and have sworn to uproot and destroy the Jewish state?

Is what happened and what continues to happen to Jonathan Pollard logical, given all the facts and the evidence?

And, the list goes on and on. But because we live smack in the middle of all of it, we accept it. We can't deny its reality, and for some reason, once something becomes a fact, we seem to authenticate it as if it was the more logical result at the time, even though it was not. Take for example the attack on the Twin Towers, which prompted a military response, but not one of soul-searching. As the facts came out, it became clear how ridiculous the attack was, in relation to its level of success. Just because something happens doesn't mean it makes sense to us, even though we continue on as if it does make sense.

Indeed, some people do keep score. They keep track of the events, they analyze them, and they can often be heard saying, "Crazy! This world is crazy!"

What they really mean is, "Given the present course of history and past experience, it does not make sense that what happened could happen in the end." But it did, and because it did, it has changed so much so quickly, and in ways that no one really anticipated.

Was the Holocaust logical to us?

MELAVE MALKAH:

G-d is your Guardian; G-d is your Shade at your right hand. (Tehillim 130:5)

Is there a time when He is not? No, He is ALWAYS there. But what about the times when it seems as if He isn't? So, Dovid HaMelech, the chosen king of G-d, who suffered his ENTIRE life, answered that question: Check your shade.

One of the most moving pictures I have ever seen is from the Holocaust. In typical Nazi style, they stole a Paroches from an Aron HaKodesh, and draped it over the entrance to a gas chamber. Embroidered in the upper piece were the words, "This is the gate of G-d, through which the righteous will enter," meant to be a complete mockery of the Jew, Judaism, and his G-d. How typically Amalekian!

My first impression of this was one of piercing pain, as I imagined how many Jews had to walk under that Paroches on the way to their deaths at the hands of barbarians. How they must have felt, so abandoned, so broken, that G-d would take the work of their hands and allow it to be used to humiliate them so, and at such a time as that.

Yet, the more I stared at the picture, I began to feel differently, until something inside made me feel as if the joke was on the Germans, and not the Jews. For, what I had at first perceived as an

abandonment of the Jews of that time by G-d, began to appear as a Divine communiqué of just the opposite. Instead, it occurred to me that Heaven was telling the Jews lined up on their way to their deaths that, by passing under that Paroches on the way into the gas chamber, was a message from Heaven, that they were liked to a holy Sefer Torah being returned to its resting place in the Holy Ark.

To the Nazis it was nothing but a killing chamber, and to their ruse, a last minute smack at the lowly Jews on their way to systematic extermination. To Heaven, it was about Sifrei Torah being returned to the Aron HaKodesh, giving incredible meaning to what appeared, at first, to be the most meaningless of deaths. Indeed, the Talmud writes:

Rebi Shimon ben Elazar said: "One who stands by the dead at the parting of the soul is bound to tear [his garments in mourning]. What does this resemble? A Torah scroll that is burnt!" (Shabbos 105b)

World Wars change much, but the Holocaust changed even more, especially with respect to the Jewish people. From a Kabbalistic point of view, there is no way to imagine the size of the tikun it brought to the world, but one need only ask what the world would have been like without it in order to gain a little appreciation of what it was sent to do.

This is the deeper meaning of the words:

G-d spoke to Moshe, saying, "Speak to Aharon and say to him: When you kindle the lamps, toward the face of the Menorah should the seven lamps cast light." (Bamidbar 8:1)

Six lamps, corresponding to the six thousand years of history, all pointing at the seventh lamp, which points upward, in the direction of Arich Anpin, the direction of Ayin, the direction of what the Talmud refers to as "Kavshei Rachmana," the "Secrets of Heaven." It is a term used primarily to refer to events like the death of Rebi Akiva and the other nine martyrs, the crusades, the pogroms, and the Holocaust.

Like the seventh lamp, the Divine Providence of Ayin is visible to us, but it flows independently Heavenward, as if to hint that its true revelation is much higher up, way beyond eyeshot, for instance, when Moshe Rabbeinu stood on Har Sinai asking to see the reward of Rebi Akiva for his self-sacrifice of Torah. Far above the natural world of the camp below, and he had thought incorrectly, that Ayin could be seen more clearly from where he stood, and he was aghast when he found out differently.

Nevertheless, the lack of logic regarding the events of Jewish history, if they mean anything at all, is that Ayin has revealed itself to us, something that only happens when the stakes are high. It means that something great is at hand, and we need help from the CEO of history to go to the next great step. This is something that we must keep in mind as we head into a period of history that is becoming less logical with each passing day.

Some will get the impression that history is random and without any logic. A small minority will know that it is only without human logic, and that history is far from being random. Rather, it is Arich Anpin

making the trip down to the level of us lowly employees to inspire us and to increase productivity, not to fire us, but to fire us up, so-to-speak, like the flames of the Menorah itself, so that we will make the deadline for production (Tikun Olam) on time.

Have a great Shabbos,

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Text

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