

LIFE AFTER DEATH

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Avraham came to eulogize Sarah and to cry for her. (Bereishis 23:2)

Having done that, he then turned to the B'nei Chais in order to purchase the land in order to bury his beloved wife. And, not only did Avraham have to purchase land that was destined to be his in the future, but he did so at top dollar. However, the exercise was not all that futile, for the Talmud says that it won much favor in the eyes of G-d, as the following discussion between G-d and Moshe Rabbenu reveals:

"What a shame about the ones who are lost and are not to be found. Many times I revealed Myself to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov as El Shaddai, and they never questioned Me, nor did they ask, 'What is Your Name?' I told Avraham, 'Arise, and walk the length and width of the land that I am giving to you.' (Bereishis 13:17). Yet, when he wanted a place to bury Sarah, he couldn't find anything until he purchased land for four hundred shekels!" (Sanhedrin 111a)

In the Torah, the word "to cry" is written, v'livkosah - Vav-Lamed-Bais- Chof-Tav-Heh. However, of all the letters, the Chof is written smaller than the rest making it stand out. For this reason, the rabbis use it to teach various different lessons, one of the main ones being that Avraham contained his mourning for his beloved wife and did not cry for her excessively:

My uncle, the elderly GR"A from Vilna, said that the reason why the Chof is written small in v'livkosah, is because Avraham knew that she had perfected herself as much as she needed to, and therefore he didn't cry for her soul, just her body . . . (Penimim M'Shulchan HaGR"A, p. 49)

Why the Chof? Why is "that" letter the most suitable letter to teach this lesson? After last week's parshah, we no longer need to ask this question, if you recall the conclusion:

"Rav Kahana said: Rav Nachman bar Munyumi elucidated in the name of Rebi Tanchum: A Chanukah light placed higher than 20 amos (30-40 feet) is unfit . . . (Shabbos 22a). The eye does not see higher than 20 amos, and therefore, there is no pirsumei nissa (proclamation of the miracle) (Rashi). Another way of saying "to proclaim the miracle" is to "acknowledge the Hashgochah Pratis (the Divine Providence)." And, as I have written before, the number twenty, a number represented by the letter Chof, not only represents a physical blindness, but a spiritual one as well. Thus, the veil that covered the entrance to the Courtyard of the Mishkan, in which the hand of G-d was openly revealed, was

twenty amos wide, indicating how difficult it is to see the hand of G-d in the world beyond the curtain, such as in the natural world of everyday life.

Thus, the Chof is alluding to the conclusion of the Talmudic account. By being small, the Chof indicates that the death of Sarah Imeinu did not throw Avraham for a hashkofic loop, neither by the loss of his dear wife nor by the need to get involved in the technical details of buying a burial spot in a land that G-d had already given to him as an inheritance.

Okay. But why do we have to know about this? And, what does it have to do with Moshe Rabbeinu's complaint about Pharaoh's reluctance to release the enslaved Jewish people upon G-d's request, a request which increased the slavery beyond reason? What *ma'aseh avos siman l'banim* does this present to the generations of Jews to follow? Just this:

He told him, "No longer will you be called 'Ya'akov,' but 'Yisroel,' because you have struggled with [an angel of] G-d and with men and have prevailed." (Bereishis 32:25-29)

SHABBOS DAY:

Ya'akov heard that Dinah his daughter had been defiled, but while his sons were with his herds in the field, he said nothing until they returned. (Bereishis 34:5)

One would think that fighting with an angel is more difficult than fighting with another person. Angels work directly for G-d and have all kinds of supernatural skills; humans can be outsmarted and outgunned. Yet, the posuk implies that overcoming men (Eisav and Lavan) was a greater accomplishment for Ya'akov Avinu than fighting with an angel, for that is mentioned second.

The answer is that it has more to do with what one is fighting for. If it is only an issue of physically overpowering one's enemy, then fighting with an angel is certainly more difficult. However, for Ya'akov Avinu who was setting the spiritual stage for millennia for Jews to come, physical battles were not his central focus. He was far more interested in laying the groundwork for spiritual survival in a world that is far more dangerous spiritually than it is physically.

The beauty of fighting with an angel is that it is difficult to confuse the battle for a purely physical one. Being Heaven-sent, a person who fights with an angel can only see it as a test from G-d, and respond accordingly. However, the problem with fighting a person is that it is so easy to forget that, he too is only a messenger from G-d, sent to interact with us in order to test.

However, since the other person behaves as if he can act so independently of the will of G-d, we often respond to the person as if he is independent of G-d. Even losing one's temper as a response to conflict is unnecessary since it is like, in a sense, getting angry at G-d. Rather, we're really supposed to take a step back and ask ourselves, "Who sent this to me? What does this situation demand of me that can be considered acting according to the will of G-d?"

Right! Well, for most of the world's population over history, if this is true, it is true only in theory.

However, for Ya'akov Avinu such an outlook towards life was his actual way of life, which he had to prove. This is why his name was not officially changed to Yisroel until after the episode with Dinah in Shechem. It was then that he had to descend to the spiritual lowest of mankind, to a level of impurity so intense that one could easily get the impression that G-d is not always here, G-d forbid.

I mean, how could G-d have even allowed such an impure person approach such a holy young lady as the daughter of Ya'akov and Leah, let alone have his way with her? For something like that to happen to a Jewish woman today, G-d forbid, during such a time of intense Hester Panim, would prompt all kinds of questioning of Hashgochah Pratis; how much more so in Ya'akov's time when man was talking directly to G-d! And, this occurred just after his having defeated the angel and having his name changed, a sign of high praise from Heaven.

Yet, like his grandfather before him who had to bargain with the lowly Efron while the pure body of his holy wife lay awaiting burial, Ya'akov did not allow the connection between G-d and himself to break, not even temporarily. Even though Shimon and Levi totally lost it, taking revenge against all the males of the city, Ya'akov remained even-keeled and pronounced the phrase that, perhaps, best sums up the essence of the Jew: "This too is for the good" - in spite of the fact it was VERY hard to see how at the time.

However, after having survived the test in Beit El, G-d confirmed what the angel had spoken about before arriving at Shechem: Ya'akov was a true Yisroel. His belief in the future had allowed him to persevere against the problems of the present, to outlast the evil that seems all-pervasive in Olam HaZeh (this world). It is one thing to fight the "Angel of Eisav" when he presents himself as such, but it is something altogether different to fight him when he wears human clothing. In both cases, he works for G-d to test a person, but you have to be a Yisroel to see that in order to act accordingly in the case of the latter.

That was Ya'akov in his time, and that was Avraham when he bought the cave in which to bury his beloved Sarah.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

Pharaoh called Yosef "Tzafnas Paneach." He gave to him Osnas, the daughter of Potiphera, the Priest of On, as a wife. (Bereishis 41:45)

It is unlikely that Yisroel knew back in Shechem that the daughter of the union between Shechem and Dinah would end up becoming the wife of Yosef when he went down to Egypt, and from whom Ephraim and Menashe would later be born. As to how their daughter ended up in Egypt, and then adopted by Potiphar, the master of Yosef, there is a midrash. (Pirkei d'Rebi Eliezer, Ch. 32)

As to why Yosef's wife had to come down to Egypt this way, there is an Arizal:

As a result of the sin of Adam HaRishon, the [Holy] Sparks became intermingled, and some fell into the depths of the Klipos. Therefore, since Shechem had a spark of Adam HaRishon, he was drawn to

Dinah. He was killed after his rectification of performing Bris Milah. Know that Chanina ben Teradyon was the reincarnation of the good aspect of Shechem ben Chamor . . . Therefore, rachavas-Raish-Ches-Bais-Tav- is the roshei teivos of Rebi Chanina ben Teradyon. (Likutei Torah, Vayishlach, 34:8, 21)

The posuk to which the Arizal refers is this:

Chamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the people of the city and said, "These men are at peace with us; let them settle in the land and deal in it. The land as you can see, is large enough (rachavas-yadayim) for them." (Bereishis 34:20-21)

Thus, right in the posuk is an allusion to the great Rebi Chanina ben Teradyon, who would later die as one of the Ten Martyrs during Roman times (Avodah Zarah 18a). Had it not been for the Arizal, it would never have occurred to us that the story has any connection to the great rabbi from the future, revealing the profundity of a tikun that seems to have come as a result of such a base and illicit action.

And, had it not been for the Midrash, we would not have known the somewhat immediate positive result of the episode in Shechem. The violation of Dinah, compelled Shechem to do Bris Milah. And, because he did Bris Milah, the wayward Holy Spark from Adam HaRishon finally had its tikun, at least enough to become the soul of the great Rebi Chanina ben Teradyon, whose own death probably completed the tikun process for that particular spark.

In the meantime, the wife of Yosef HaTzaddik had been brought into the world, possessing her own Holy Sparks necessary to give birth to Ephraim and Menashe. Once again, the Sitra Achra was duped: Avraham from Terach, Rus from Lot and his daughter, Peretz from Yehudah and Tamar, etc., proving once again that G-d's inherent goodness guarantees that everything - absolutely everything, must also end up being for the good as well.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Thus the field of Efron in Makpelah adjoining Mamre, the field and the cave which is in it, and all the trees within its borders became Avraham's uncontested possession, witnessed by all of the sons of Ches who came to the gate of his city. (Bereishis 23:17)

What good came of Avraham's forbearance and deep emunah? In the short term, he had bought the cave he had desired ever since finding out it was the burial place of Adam and Chava (Zohar Chadash, Rus). But in the long term, what was the inherent good that the entire episode sealed for his descendants?

In this case, the answer to the question may be coming up, b"H, as the final stage of the battle for Chevron begins to take shape. As we have learned first hand, it does not matter to the world what Rashi wrote at the very beginning of his commentary on the Torah, that the Torah began with the account of Creation to remind the world that Eretz Yisroel is the eternal inheritance of the Jewish

people, given to us by G-d. The Arabs are demanding, and the world is complying, including our own people.

When Moshiach finally arrives and restores Torah-order, that first Rashi will kick in for good. In the meantime, we need additional spiritual energy to keep ourselves attached to the land, even if, G-d forbid, it is taken from us temporarily. Very little creates as deep a bond in this world as actually purchasing something, an idea we see emphasized in the actual process of getting married (Kiddushin 2a).

The Leshem adds to this by explaining what happens spiritually to the purchaser and the purchasee. He says that the actual process of buying something creates a spiritual bond between the purchaser and that which is being bought, even if he wasn't so attracted to it in the first place. Paying money out of our own pocket for something is like surrendering a part of us for which we receive the object in return, on a spiritual level as well as a physical one.

Thus, by purchasing Chevron, Shechem, and Yerushalayim, created another level of bond between the Jewish people and these specific holy spots in their land, bonds that will keep us attached no matter how many try to steal the land away from us. In this respect, Avraham understood that what he was going through was Hashgochah Pratis, a Divine set-up to lay the groundwork for a future and more eternal bond with the land. The death of his wife became the source of another level of life in the relationship between the Jewish people and their land.

Have a great Shabbos,
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