

OH NO! NOT DENILE AGAIN!

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

When the people saw that Moshe delayed a long while before coming down the mountain, they gathered around Aharon and said to him, "Make us gods to go before us. We are unsure of what happened to Moshe, the one who brought us out of Egypt." (Shemos 32:1)

Last week I experienced something that shook me up. Actually there were two things. The first one was a video presentation that made the case for a major conspiracy that is so controversial; I'm not even going to talk about it here. I realize that I am not being VERY unfair, but if I mentioned it, then this week's Perceptions probably wouldn't even make it to you.

What's the point? Next, the second thing also shook me up. You see, after watching the video (and it is over one hour long), and I watched it more than once; it shook me to my core. It answered so many questions that I have had about the world today, and particularly about the direction we are going here in Israel. However, it answered them in a way that I wish wasn't true.

My son, who is a hard-sell when it comes to conspiracy stories and stuff like that, actually sat for the hour and watched it with me. When we were finished, he turned to me and said, "Woe. This is incredible. No one will believe me. They'll have to watch it for themselves."

And he was right. They didn't believe me either. In fact, being so moved as I was I couldn't help but tell some of my closest friends, people who usually relate to what I tell them. True, they might have given me the occasional, "No way!" in the past, but in a way that always meant, "Wow! That is hard to believe. Let me see what you are talking about!"

This elicited a different response. Without even caring to know what I was talking about, without even having an inkling of the evidence that I had seen, evidence that is so incredibly comprehensive and to the point, they wrote me off before even questioning their previous knowledge of the event. I expected serious and healthy skepticism; I experienced outright denial. It was VERY disappointing, and actually, quite scary.

However, the next day, I saw another person who I know is an easy sell on these matters. Like me, this person sees today's events in terms of the End-of-Days, and is focused on seeing the hand of G-d in all that is occurring. After I told this person about the video, the person told me, "Don't you remember some time back listening to that tape by Rabbi So- and-So, who spoke about the same

matter?" I paused to recall, and vaguely, I did.

"At the time you couldn't believe what he said," the person reminded me. "You said it was too fantastic . . . too hard to believe." I paused again, as I recalled my initial reaction back then. The person was correct, but with a slight and important difference: I did not deny the possibility that what I had heard was correct. It was just that, without the actual evidence to prove his point, I had difficulty trusting the veracity of the claim. After all, trusting what I heard on the tape meant a major change in my way of thinking, something normal people don't do without hard-core evidence.

Furthermore, I did not know the rabbi speaking on the tape, so I was being asked to rely upon a stranger regarding the information I could not be sure even existed. However, my friends know me well. I also make claims, and put forth all kinds of Ends-of-Days material, but not without a source to back me up, at least conceptually. So, if I was so anxious and even somewhat confident in the truth of the video, shouldn't they have at least wanted to see it first before shutting it out so completely, especially with so much at stake?

As far as I can see, either the video is true, or the producer of it is the true conspirator, going to a very great extent to falsify information and documentation to make a case that doesn't exist. The latter, while possible, doesn't seem likely, whereas the former, though at first it didn't seem possible, all of sudden seems likely.

SHABBOS DAY:

G-d told Moshe, *"Go down. Your people which you brought out of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have quickly left the way which I commanded them. They have made a molten calf, and have bowed to it and sacrificed to it . . . (Shemos 32:7-8)*

What is behind the reaction of denial? If someone says to you, "I have something important for you to hear (or see), and it can change your life," what would your reaction most likely be? It all depends upon what is at stake, and how much self-honesty you have.

If a person is dissatisfied with his life, then he is most likely to be looking for something to happen in order to change it. However, if a person is content with his life, and he is told that he may have to change it, there is resistance. There are only two possible avenues the mind can follow: either the information demanding change is wrong, or I am wrong . . . and I will have to make the change, no matter how uncomfortable it might be.

It takes a person devoted more to truth than to himself to be able to look a different point of view in the eye and humble himself to it. The more change that acceptance of an idea demands, the greater one's commitment to truth has to be. Otherwise, a person feels quite automatically threatened, moves into a defensive mode, and denies the truth.

The truth is, most of us react this way on some level. Personal growth is dependent upon overcoming one's reaction of denial, because that is the only way to confront what we do wrong,

which is the first stage in implementing life-enhancing changes. Otherwise, not only does the person not grow, but his relationships don't grow either, and instead regress, and all too often, disintegrate. And, it gets even worse: it turns into a form of avodah zarah (idol worship). In fact, it turns into a golden calf, or a Tower of Bavel. That's what both of them were about. They were all about denial. For, the alternative to Migdal Bavel was G-d, something the people of that time did not want to accept. Belief in G-d brings with it responsibility, and that can bring denial out in just about anyone.

The Midrash says that there were three intentions behind the tower's construction: 1) to war against G-d; 2) to plug the hole in the sky that results in floods every 1,656 years; and 3) to create a new world order. When G-d destroyed the tower, the part that represented war against Heaven was completely destroyed. The part representing the building of a new world order was partly submerged in the ground, and the part that was man's effort to "naturalize" the Acts of G-d, remained intact.

Rav Frank, zt"l, one of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's foremost students explained the Midrash in the following way. The part that was destroyed meant that man no longer warred against G-d from that point onward, except for Amalek. By the destruction of the tower, just about everyone realized the futility of doing so, so they war in the name of G-d instead.

As for the plan for a new world order, that was partially submerged, meaning, Rav Frank said, that it comes and goes throughout history. Personally, I had never heard the term until 1991, when George Bush Sr. invoked it upon his victory over Iraq after their invasion into Kuwait. However, when he abruptly left office after one term, the phrase seemed to have left with him. (Though, the people who helped him implement it did not leave; many of them came back when George Bush Jr. was elected.)

As for trivializing the Acts of G-d, it's an ongoing habit of mankind. Like people who can't wait until the weekend to rest, mankind is bent on having its portion of Olam HaBah in this world. This feat is not so difficult in the secular world, which allows one to indulge somewhat in the weekend pleasures all week long. Perhaps that is why the Jewish people have the mitzvah of Shabbos, and other special mitzvos to do the rest of the week; it forces us to make the distinction between both, Shabbos and weekday, and to stay somewhat focused.

For, even the Torah-observant can create a niche of simulated eternal pleasure, especially in these times of prosperity and general acceptance amongst the gentiles. So much comes so much easier for us these days: Shabbos, Kashrus, Taharas Mishpachos, etc., and especially in places like America, Canada, and England. Rock those boats, rattle those cages, and you can get denial even from those who are supposed to be pursuing truth - THE Truth, from moment-to-moment in everyday life.

Even here in Eretz Yisroel, when talking to Torah-observant Jews who have even gone so far as to have made aliyah for ideological reasons, you can get reactions that state, without having seen the evidence otherwise: "We can't be THAT far along in the process of Gog and Magog!" Can we?

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

Let your father and your mother be glad, and let her that bore you rejoice! (Mishlei 23:25).

The golden calf was a statement. For some, it was a way to naturalize the miracles of the past two years:

He took all of it from them, and with an engraving tool formed it and made a molten calf. They said, *"These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of Egypt!"* (Shemos 32:4)

Gods, yes. G-d, no. The former implies deities in the image of man, while the latter implies a responsibility and debt of gratitude to the Creator of everything. For, others, it represented the chance for a new world order. Like the Tower of Bavel, the calf was an organizing element, the center-point of a new world community bent on a life of eternal (gold) youth (calf). One served this god with licentiousness, with a sense of youthful abandonment. And, as always, the Erev Rav were, and still are, its high priests.

Contrast this to the Kruvim from a few parshios ago, the youthful images that adorned the top of the Aron HaKodesh. Youthful, yes. Abandonment? Never, unless it is to G-d Himself. These "youths" were the ornament on top of the vessel that contained the Luchos HaBris, and all the laws kept within. It is wonderful to maintain a youthful attitude, the Torah teaches, as long as the mind driving it is mature with Torah.

That was Yosef HaTzaddik. He was this uncanny combination of responsible youthfulness, a term, that today seems like an oxymoron at best. Indeed, it was the golden plate that was used to surface the bones of Yosef from the Nile River that was thrown into the fire to produce the golden calf. The makers of the calf captured Yosef's youthfulness, while leaving behind his sense of responsibility and closeness to G-d. It is the combination of both that is the source of true chayn, associated with Yosef specifically.

And Choni HaMaggel - the "Circle-Drawer", as well. The Talmud records that during one of the periods of drought, during the Second Temple period, the people turned to Choni HaMaggel - the "Circle-Drawer", to invoke a miracle from Heaven. Choni went out before G-d and drew a circle around himself, threatening Heaven, so-to-speak, that he would not leave the circle until rain fell, which it did. He acted purely on behalf of the people, and on behalf of Heaven as well. However, the rain did not come down in a substantial amount, so he complained that the people did not summon him for such a poor showing of salvation. So, Heaven complied and it poured, an even greater miracle, enough to leave anyone watching in awe and gratefulness.

But not Choni. Instead, he complained that it rained too hard, and asked Heaven to provide a pleasant rain, seemingly an outrageous request for a flesh-and-blood creation to ask of the Master of the Universe. However, once again, Heaven complied, and the drought came to a pleasant end, and Choni left his circle, mission accomplished.

Nevertheless, in spite of Choni's miraculous antics, and the redemption he "arranged" on behalf of the nation, he attracted some negative attention as well, as the Talmud records:

Shimon ben Shetach sent to Choni HaMaggel, "You deserve to be excommunicated, and were you not Choni, I would pronounce excommunication against you. But what can I do seeing that you ingratiate yourself with the Omnipresent and He performs your desires, and you are like a son who ingratiates himself with his father and he performs his desires. To you applies the verse, 'Let your father and your mother be glad, and let her that bore you rejoice!' (Mishlei 23:25)." (Ta'anis 19a)

MELAVE MALKAH:

Interesting, is it not, that the word for "Circle-Drawer" - maggel, is spelled: MEM-AYIN-GIMMEL-LAMED, the last three letters spelling the word eigel (calf) as in eigel hazahav (the golden calf)? And, in Hebrew, the addition of the letter before the noun transforms it into a verb.

For example, the Hebrew word dibur means word, but add a Mem before its root word - Dalet-Bais-Raish, and the result is medabehr (speaker). Hence, since Ayin-Gimmel-Lamed spells the Hebrew word for calf, one could read HaMaggel as "calfer," so to speak. But, what is a calfer?

According to Rabbi Shimson Raphael Hirsch, the addition of the Mem to a word also represents the extension of the idea expressed by the root word. For example, said Rabbi Hirsch, Gog is the philosophy, Magog is the projection of the philosophy of Gog. Thus, Rabbi Hirsch held, the final battle of Gog and Magog is destined to be an ideological one, a clash of philosophies, one of those being Torah philosophy, the other one being the Western world's approach to life.

Well, that has certainly come to fruition, especially here in the Holy Land. Applying this approach, HaMaggel would mean that, whoever Choni was, his life was a projection of the life of a calf, an idea that is supported by the words of the Talmud itself:

". . . You ingratiate yourself with the Omnipresent and He performs your desires, and you are like a son who ingratiates himself with his father and he performs his desires. To you applies the verse, 'Let your father and your mother be glad, and let her that bore you rejoice!' (Mishlei 23:25)."

Yet, to see Choni was to see an elderly man, until, that is, he went into action to save his people. He was fearsome because he was fearless, a trait of children who have yet to learn of what it is to be afraid. Or, as an adult who acts as if he has nothing to be afraid of because he only fears G-d Himself. Like the calf, as long as it is not a golden calf. The Chonis of history can look reality in the face, no matter how scary it may appear, deal with it, and not deny it.

"All that glitters is not gold." Normally this means that things in life can appear to be valuable, but be, in fact, without much value at all. That is the golden calf. Perhaps it can also mean that not everything that shines is made of gold, at least on the outside. It can appear to be without value, but in fact, be the greatest asset of society. On the inside, it is another story altogether, and that was the story of Choni HaMaggel, and before him, the story of Yosef HaTzaddik.

And, as we move from Purim to Pesach, we are supposed to learn that, ultimately, it is the story of freedom as well.

*Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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