

SET YOUR SITES

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

See, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse... (Devarim 11:26)

This is the third "Shabbat of Consolation", which is easier to feel since Tisha B'Av is now far behind us. Sometimes Tisha B'Av falls early in the week, and there is time to become consoled by Shabbat Nachamu. However, this year Tisha B'Av fell on Thursday, and having one day to catch up on the cleaning in advance of Shabbat, only served to emphasize that we were mourning for the calamities of the Ninth of Av.

With a war raging in the background, and many of the Gedolei Torah coming out against taking "vacations", especially trips for pleasure, there is little consolation this year. Now, I don't know about you, but for me, once Tisha B'Av leaves I feel as if I am on a fast track to Rosh Hashanah and the Aseret Yemai Teshuvah, the most serious time of the year. Summers aren't what they used to be when I was young.

Indeed, the "Three Weeks" are VERY connected to the Aseret Yemai Teshuvah, to the extent that they are considered to be the preparation for Aseret Yemai Teshuvah. To begin with, there are fifty (Nun) days from Tisha B'Av until Rosh Hashanah, and there are ten (Yud) days from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur. After Yom Kippur, there are four (Dalet) days until the first (Aleph) day of Succot. If you combine the letters together, they spell G-d's Name: Aleph-Dalet-Nun-Yud, which corresponds to the sefirah of Malchut, and therefore Malchut Shamayim - the Kingdom of G-d.

The Maggid of Koznitz explains this idea with a wonderful parable based upon the posuk:

Judah went into exile because of affliction and great servitude; she settled among the nations, [and] found no rest; all her pursuers overtook her between the boundaries. (Eichah 1:3)

The Hebrew word for "pursuers" is "rodfeiyah", which can be read "rodfei" followed by the Yud and the Heh, which spell G-d's Name.

Thus, the word can be read "the pursuers of G-d", which is followed in the posuk by the word "overtook", or actually "will reach", as if to say, "the pursuers of G-d will reach Him." Says the Maggid of Koznitz:

For, The Blessed One goes out to assist us, as it says, *"I will be what I will be"* (Shemot 3:14), the gematria of which is twenty-one. This twenty-one alludes to the days of "Bein HaMetzarim," to say "I

will be with them to help them." Therefore, it is easier during these days to come closer to G-d more than other days. It's like a minister who sits in his chamber protected by his guards, and as a result, he is difficult to see. Furthermore, you usually have to bring a large gift just to be able to get in and see his face! However, when he travels it is much easier to see him, and one does not have to even bring a large gift, only a small one, such as a couple of cakes.

SHABBAT DAY:

All her pursuers overtook her between the boundaries. (Eichah 1:3)

Thus, the Maggid is saying, during the Three Weeks the King goes out to help us, and therefore it is easier then to meet Him. So, contrary to what one might think, at that time of year there is only Hester Panim (the hiding of G-d's face); and in truth, it is more like the Divine Presence going out on the road to look for us, making it easier for us to "reach" Him.

"However...," the Maggid continues:

...There is a difference between seeing him in his house as opposed to seeing him as he travels. For, one who sees him in his house sees him dressed in his finest clothes, whereas one who sees him along the way, sees him dressed in his traveling attire.

Thus, during the time of the Aseret Yemai Teshuvah, we visit the King in His Palace, so-to-speak. There is a much greater demand upon us if we are going to get close to the king, but what a vision it is, with all its royalty and splendor. However, during the Three Weeks, the sense of royalty is greatly reduced, greatly toned down due to the needs of His traveling.

BUT, the Maggid emphasizes, it is still much easier to greet the King, which explains why these weeks are the weeks of comfort, seven all together prior to Rosh Hashanah. For, once G-d decides to approach man once again, His anger assuaged by the destruction of bricks and stone, He descends from the seven levels of Heaven each subsequent week:

Thus, during these days G-d goes out because of their seriousness and difficulty, because on Tisha B'Av at night they ignited it, *"And His anger was finished on wood and stone"* (Eichah Rabbah 4:14). This "sweetens" the judgment, and thus at Minchah we include the prayer "Nachem". Then begins the fifty days until Rosh Hashanah, when the Nun Sha'arei Binah (the Fifty Gates of Understanding) are opened, which are the "Fifty Gates of Teshuvah". For this reason the Tanna taught: "Be (Heh-Vav-Yud) diligent (shakeid) to learn Torah", the gematria of which is twenty-one, alluding to these days which are also twenty-one, which "grow" like shekeidim (almonds), which ripen in twenty-one days as well.

This certainly presents a different picture of the Three Weeks, and the period of time that follows them. How important it is to know this at this time of history, as the battle against Jewish enemies continues to rage (at least as I write this). And, as with so many aspects of Jewish life, this time also has two faces, but only one set of eyes, the eyes that we need to use to see G-d, and ESPECIALLY at

a time when G-d seems to be the furthest away.

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

See, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse... (Devarim 11:26)

On the topic of seeing, it is worth discussing something that has come up before: Brit Krut L'Einyaim - the covenant made with the eyes. Everyone knows about Brit Milah, and some even know about Brit Sefatayim, the covenant regarding the lips, meaning that we should only say that which is holy. This is also called "Brit HaLashon", the Covenant of the Tongue," which is interesting because even Brit Milah means "covenant of the word."

However, there is an additional brit, one that is more important than the others, especially in this generation where everything is done for the eyes. The Torah tells the Jew to be holy, which means remaining focused on the ultimate goals of Torah, something that is not so easy to do when physicality is jumping out at you everywhere you turn, and there is such an emphasis on attracting attention.

Of all the senses, sight is probably the most powerful in terms of its effect on how we feel. A person can be hungry and smell delicious food, but still shut it out upon finding out that it is treif food he is smelling. Even taste is not overwhelming enough that upon being told that he is eating (delicious) treif food, the person doesn't end up saying, "Oh no! I can't spit it out... it is too good... I have to swallow..." Certainly hearing is something that most people have enough self-control over, that if they hear that something is forbidden to them, they can put their hands over their ears.

But sight is something different altogether, and therefore that much more dangerous. It seems to come with a built-in vulnerability that, even if people know that what they are looking at is not permissible, they take their time before pulling their eyes away. If curiosity has sway over any of the senses, its main servant is sight. "I just want to see..." are the famous last words of many a transgressor.

And equally bad as looking at things one ought to avoid is not looking at things that one ought to see, which can be even more dangerous. For example, how many sins are done with the eyes by people who refuse to look into the Torah to find out if it is from G-d, and what He holds when it comes to what we are supposed to look at?

Thus, the brit that applies to our eyes is not only to not look at that which is wrong for us to see, but it includes looking at that which we are commanded to see, which is what Moshe Rabbeinu is indicating to us with his opening words in this week's parshah. This also includes our "seeing" the matzav and acting appropriately, especially while we are on a "break" from learning in yeshivot.

To make his point, Rav Eliyashiv, shlita, when discouraging Jews from going on trips while this war is going on, said, "If anyone has difficulty understanding why it is inappropriate to go on pleasure trips during the break, he should go to the hospitals and visit the wounded." Apparently, there is a very

big difference between knowing about those who have been injured in battle, and seeing the injured themselves.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Perception is a real problem today. It is amazing how peoples can be so similar and yet so different. I recently saw Honest Reporting's film "Obsession", an expose of the depth of the problem of Islamic Fundamentalism in the world today. Even though I am quite aware of what is going on in that world from other sources, I was still left feeling quite uneasy by the magnitude and utter hopelessness of the problem.

As the opening quote by Edmund Burke says, "All that evil needs to triumph is that good people do nothing", setting the stage for the rest of the film. As one speaker pointed out, even if the American-Jew-hating fundamentalists only make up ten to fifteen percent of the Muslim world, you're still talking about a population larger than that of the entire United States of America!

Yet, so many in the Western world choose to be oblivious to the problem and just ignore it and hope it will go away, even though the militants themselves are saying that the ONLY direction they are prepared to go is after the destruction of America and Israel. If anyone has ever intended to carry out their threats, it is these people, Terrorism Inc. And they certainly have the money and the chutzpah to make good on their threats.

If the war in Lebanon has proved anything at all, it is how short-sighted the Western world is with regard to the problem AGAIN - call it a bad case of Chamberlainism - and how naïve or selfish other parts of the Israeli population were a year when the Gaza Strip was given away to terrorists.

It was so obvious last year that one year later we'd be battling the same old enemy again in the same old way. This is not a case of 20-20 hindsight either; it was SEEABLE from the start. The only thing that was hard to see at the time was the other point of view, what made their gamble seem worth it. As then Deputy Prime Minister Olmert told reporters, "Take a look at Lebanon. We pulled out of there, and they're loading up on missiles, and none of them have been sent to Israel. We can trust that Ashkelon won't be in danger from Gaza either."

Wrong on all accounts!

So, we kept asking ourselves, "Maybe they SEE something we can't SEE? Maybe there is a security issue that those of us not privy to classified information don't know about? Maybe there is a secret agreement between the Jews and the Arabs, or at least between Israel and the Americans, and everything will be just fine in the end?"

No, beautiful Gush Katif is no more, and its kedushah burned in the fires. Ten thousand people, once happy and loyal citizens of Medinat Yisroel are now homeless, broken, and very despondent, and even worse, forgotten by the government they risked their lives to trust. They gave everything and got nothing back in return.

About a week before the kidnappings led to the invasion of Gaza, I was "invited" to attend eight hours of driver's ed, a refresher course. On the second day, during one of the breaks, the person sitting next to me started up a conversation with two people behind us, both expelled from Gush Katif the year before. He inquired about their "journey" since then, and as they bemoaned the failure of the government, another young lady behind this couple vehemently took up the other position.

I didn't feel like getting involved because the break was about to end, and this young lady appeared quite transfixed on her opinion that it was definitely in the best interest of the country to have left Gush Katif and give it away to the Arabs. She felt that if anything, doing so would guarantee peace for the rest of the country.

Needless to say she has since been proven wrong, but I doubt that she will admit it even now that Ashkelon has been hit, and the Galil has been destroyed, just as the Talmud predicted. Certainly, the "border people" of the north have become far more sympathetic to the plight of the Katifers, albeit far too late, as they too wander from city to city, just as the Talmud predicted they would.

And, can you imagine: Olmert still wants to pull back further to the cities closer to the sea!

This country is really a microcosm of the bigger problem which covers the whole world, and it all has to do with perception. We think that people who seem intelligent should be intelligent, especially if they are eloquent and erudite. We just assume that people who seem to be mature in so many other areas of life act mature in this area of life as well. But these are assumptions that have been proven to be quite tenuous throughout history, especially when the Jews are involved. And what's even more amazing is that the Jews involved, in spite of so much good knowledge to the contrary, are just willing to make those assumptions and do little or nothing to change the situation.

We forget that the Nazis, y"s, trained many Arabs to be just like them, and while the Allies put an end to the Nazi regime at that time, the Arab segment of the Nazis just kept going until today. Who knows, maybe the president of Iran is really a reincarnation of Hitler, y"s! A chilling thought, especially if he came back with his cohorts.

There are still plenty of good people in the world, thank G-d. But getting them to do something about the very large problems that loom over us is not easy, and completely a matter of perception. But that is to their disadvantage, as September 11, 2001 proved in no uncertain terms.

Have a great Shabbos,
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